

Neo Earth

Can climate justice activists stop the geoengineering of the planet?

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The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. The newspaper is a labor of love by a network of volunteers who do all of the reporting, writing, photography, illustration, editing, designing, distribution, fundraising and website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of ordinary people locally and globally. The *Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

TUE NOV 24

6pm • \$6

SCREENING: *THE BILLBOARD TO BETH-LEHEM*. An award-winning documentary by billboard developer turned peacemaker about his work with former Palestinian and Israeli soldiers to create a peace mural in the West Bank. A discussion with filmmaker Bruce Barrett will follow. Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave 212-505-5181 • iwagepeace.org

FRI NOV 27

5pm • Free

EVENT: BUY NOTHING DAY FREEGAN FEAST. A community meal made from discarded food. Cooking starts at 5pm and dining starts around 8pm. RSVP for location 347-724-6954 • freegan.info

SAT NOV 28

8pm • \$20

BENEFIT: THANKS-4-GIVING. City Winery hosts an evening of music with blues guitarist John Hammond and other artists. All proceeds go to the Food Bank For New York City. City Winery, 155 Varick St 212-608-0555 • citywinery.com

SUN NOV 29

3-7pm • Free

BAZAAR: THE REALLY REALLY FREE MARKET. Anarchist group In Our Hearts presents a monthly indoor bazaar featuring free food, free clothes, live music and more. Judson Memorial Church 55 Washington Square South myspace.com/anewworldinourhearts

MON NOV 30

1pm • Free

MARCH: WORLD PEACE MARCH IN NEW YORK CITY. The International World March Team kicks off the American leg of its six-continent tour in New York City. Join them in a march for peace from Brooklyn Borough Hall across the bridge to City Hall. Borough Hall, 209 Joralemon St, Bklyn worldmarchinnyc.org

8pm • \$10/\$19 sliding scale

DISCUSSION: PAUL AUSTER AND JAVIER MARÍAS. Author Rick Moody will introduce Paul Auster, the author

of *The New York Trilogy* and the new novel *Invisible*. Wyatt Mason, contributing editor at *Harper's*, will introduce the Spanish novelist Javier Marías, who will be in the United States for the first time in more than 20 years. 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Ave 212-415-5500 • 92Y.org

TUE DEC 1

12:01am • Free

MEMORIAL: WORLD AIDS DAY VIGIL. For 24 hours, the names of people who have died of HIV/AIDS will be read aloud in remembrance and to raise awareness. City Hall Park, Manhattan 347-473-7400 • housingworks.org

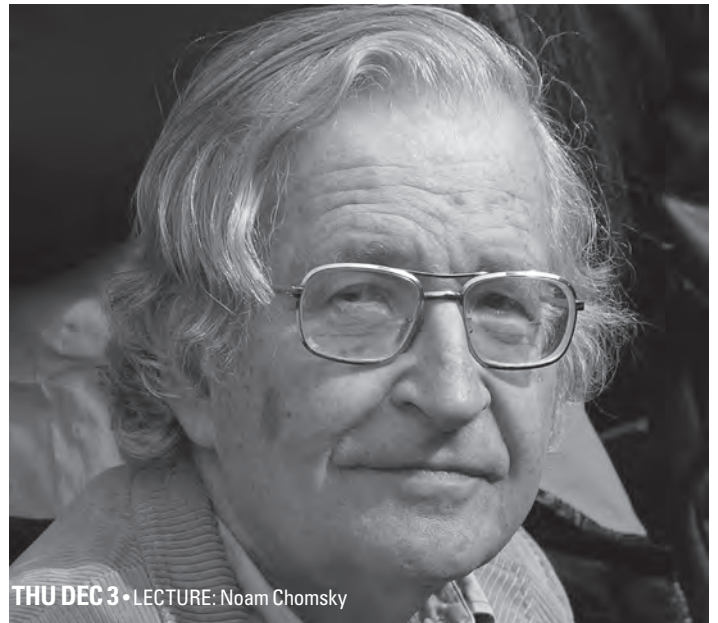
6:30-9:30pm • \$20 adv/\$25 door

BENEFIT: QUEER MEN'S EROTIC ART WORKSHOP: AN EXHIBITION COMMEMORATING WORLD AIDS DAY. See the fantasy recreation of an artist's studio. Admission includes a holiday cocktail with the artists and models, a signed art piece and three raffle tickets. The event benefits The Center's HIV/AIDS Youth Prevention Program. LGBT Center, 208 W 13th St 212-620-7310 • gaycenter.org

7pm • \$7adv/\$10 door/Free for students
DISCUSSION: "SEX. CONSENT. POWER. PLEASURE." A screening of the film *The Line* and a panel discussion with filmmaker Nancy Schwartzman, Erin Burrows of Students Active For Ending Rape, Joseph Samalin of Men Can Stop Rape and Ignacio River, a sex educator, organizer and performance artist. Gallery Bar, 120 Orchard St rsvp@paradigmhiftnyc.com

7pm • \$5 Suggested
DISCUSSION: SPORTS AND SEXUALITY: FIGHTING FOR A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD. Dave Zirin will discuss the struggle for equality for women and LGBTQ people in sports. Zirin is the author of *A People's History of Sports in the United States*. Bluestockings, 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

NOV—DEC



THU DEC 3 • LECTURE: Noam Chomsky

WED DEC 2

6:30-8:30pm • Free

SCREENING: *EL CÍRCULO*. This documentary, directed by José Pedro Charlo and Aldo Garay, focuses on a scientist who was imprisoned under the Uruguayan dictatorship for 13 years. El Museo del Barrio 1230 Fifth Ave, Manhattan RSVP: elmuseo.org

7pm • Free

BOOK PARTY: JOHN GERASSI'S *TALKING WITH SARTRE: CONVERSATIONS AND DEBATES*. This new book is a result of a series of interviews John Gerassi, who was authorized by Jean-Paul Sartre to write his biography, conducted with the legendary existentialist in the early 1970s. Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St 212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

8-10pm • Free

SCREENING: VOX POP MOVIE NIGHT. Laugh and learn about democracy with *The Promise of New York*, as ordinary citizens battle incumbent Michael Bloomberg for the position of mayor of New York City. Vox Pop Café, 1022 Cortelyou Rd, Bklyn 718-940-2084 • voxpopnet.net

THU DEC 3

6:15pm • Free

LECTURE: FIFTH ANNUAL EDWARD SAID MEMORIAL LECTURE. Noam Chomsky will deliver the Fifth Annual Edward Said Memorial Lecture: "The Unipolar Moment and the Culture of Imperialism." Presented by The Heyman Center for the Humanities. Columbia University, Altschul Hall Room 417, 420 W 118th St 212-854-8443 • heymancenter.org

FRI DEC 4

7:30pm • \$6/\$10/\$15 sliding scale

LECTURE: RIGHT-WING POPULISM & WHITE RAGE. Policy analyst Chip Berlet will discuss the rise and impact of right-wing populism with Matthew N. Lyons, author of *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*. Brecht Forum, 451 West St 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

SUN DEC 6

10am-noon • \$5

WORKSHOP: MUCH ADO ABOUT MULCHING. Indoor lecture on composting and mulching followed by a hands-on experience in Tompkins Square Park. Sustainable NYC, 139 Ave A Register online: lesecologycenter.org

reader comments

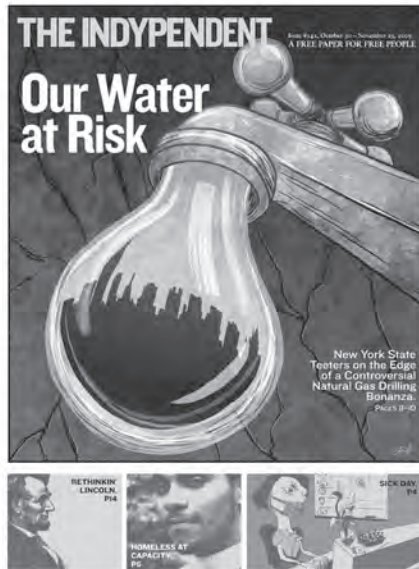
Post your own comments online at the end of each article at indypendent.org or email letters@indypendent.org.

RESPONSES TO "DRILLING DEEP INTO CONTROVERSY," OCT. 30:

If Pennsylvania's rivers already can't handle all the drilling wastewater from drilling in the state, how can New York's wastewater be added to an existing problem? It's time to get some scrutiny on all these drilling practices, before we record more fish kills and contaminated drinking water.

—ROBERT

I grew up in the coal country of Pennsylvania where streams still run orange from mining pollution and where large piles of coal waste litter the landscape and continue to acidify the streams. Now it's the same potential scenario in our wooded landscapes where hard-working people are desperate to make a buck, not often realizing the large risks that are masked by those companies seeking the gas. Many of the laws to regulate the mining industry back then were not in place but today we should have the



tools to protect our rivers and drinking water. The only way we will not have another environmental catastrophe is to show up to

meetings and hold our agencies accountable to enforce the laws on the books.

—OSIRUS

RESPONSES TO "HATE CRIME COLLISION," OCT. 30:

Sadly this happens all too often. I have not been physically assaulted, but I have been denied access to shops and verbally harassed because of my beliefs. Every time I go out there is a danger of something happening, but I leave it in God's hands.

—KHADIJAH

This is a good article. Something similar happened to my Muslim daughter here in Durham about two months ago, when her young children were in the car with her, too. I hope that the young sister will not stop wearing hijab. Then, you have let the others win. I am Muslimah for life, and will always be a hijabi for life, no matter what.

—FATIMAH

Bronx Bakery Buy-Out Crumbles

BY JOHN TARLETON

The Stella D'oro Biscuit Co. in the Bronx closed Oct. 8, putting 136 unionized employees out of work. After a strike that lasted nearly a year and an extensive legal battle, the factory has been sold and much of the plant's equipment has been dismantled and shipped to a non-union shop in Ohio.

At an Oct. 29 rally and press conference outside the factory gates, the workers revealed that CITGO, the U.S.-based subsidiary of Venezuela's state oil company, had expressed interest in buying the abandoned factory but had been rebuffed by Brynwood Partners, a Connecticut-based private equity firm that sold Stella D'oro to snack food giant Lance, Inc. Brynwood completed the sale after its demands for draconian cuts in wages and benefits provoked a bitter 11-month strike by members of Bakery Workers Local 50.

"CITGO tried to call them, email them, and they [Brynwood] refused to respond," said Stella D'oro shop steward Mike Filippou.

A CITGO spokesperson confirmed to *The Independent* that the company "did



STELLAR: Workers at the Stella D'oro Biscuit Co. in the Bronx exit the factory on their final day of work Oct. 8. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez expressed interest in buying the factory shortly before it closed. PHOTO: JOHN TARLETON

express an interest in purchasing the plant but did not receive a response."

MEETING HUGO

CITGO's involvement began after several of the workers and their supporters spoke with Hugo Chávez during a Sept. 23 reception at the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the U.N. After Chávez asked how he could help, one of the workers urged him to buy the company.

Chávez mentioned the "cracker factory" on *Larry King Live* later that night and spoke of buying it during a speech he gave the following day at the United Nations. A week later, CITGO executive Andreas Rangel flew in from Houston and held a pair of meetings with Stella D'oro workers and supporters.

René Rojas, a Bronx community activist who was present at the meetings, said CITGO was interested in buying or renting the bakery at 237th Street and Broadway. Rojas said CITGO wanted to reorganize it as a worker-run cooperative and resume production under another name, since Brynwood had already agreed to sell the Stella D'oro brand to Lance. There were also informal discussions about how made-in-the-Bronx cookies could be sold at CITGO's 7,000 gas stations, located in

the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and South.

"They were interested in showcasing a form of production which was beneficial to the whole community and which privileged social results rather than just economic objectives," Rojas said. CITGO has cited similar social concerns as the reason for its past initiatives in the Bronx: Since 2005, the company has provided discounted heating oil for low-income apartment dwellers in the borough, along with funding support for a number of community-based nonprofits. CITGO's parent company has financed many worker cooperatives in Venezuela, one of several Latin American countries where the number of co-ops has been on the rise. (See "Who Needs a Boss" box.)

BLOOMBERG REJECTION

The Stella workers and their supporters said they had also reached out to the Bloomberg administration to seek help in brokering a deal with Brynwood, but received no assistance.

"How are you the mayor of a city and let this happen on your watch?" asked Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, a Bronx-based union activist. "He [Bloomberg] didn't even try to find a solution. We did. It's such a travesty."

Continued on page 17



Stuy-Town Win Could Have Ripple Effect

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The New York State Court of Appeals handed tenants a major victory Oct. 22 when it ruled that the owners of Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village could not deregulate rents while taking tax breaks for renovating rent-stabilized apartments.

The court held 4-2 that buildings receiving tax benefits under the city's J-51 program must remain rent-stabilized. It invalidated the state housing agency's policy, which said that landlords could deregulate rents in those buildings as long as the tax breaks were not the only reason the apartments were rent-stabilized. Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village was rent-stabilized before 1992, when it started a 25-year arrangement to receive J-51 benefits.

Tishman-Speyer, which bought the East Side complex in 2006, may be liable for \$200 million in rent overcharges. Rents on about 4,400 of the 11,200 apartments there have been deregulated, according to the Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village Tenants Association.

The decision means that "many tenants now have an opportunity to regain the rent-stabilized status that their landlords, assisted by the city and state governments, tried to take away," housing attorney Seth A. Miller wrote in *Tenant/Inquilino*, the newspaper of the tenants rights group, Metropolitan Council on Housing. It applies to any building that receives J-51 benefits and to tenants who were not notified in their leases that their rents could go up when the benefits ended, he explains.

Citywide, the Citizens Housing and Planning Council estimated in March that more than 8,000 buildings with about 350,000 units were receiving J-51 exemptions or abatements.

No one knows how many of those have been deregulated, as the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal does not keep such records. Earlier this year, in a survey of buildings considered "predatory equity" — purchased by owners whose business model requires driving out rent-stabilized tenants — the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) identified 27,708 units citywide that receive J-51 benefits. But many of those are in neighborhoods where landlords have not been able to bring rents up to the \$2,000 needed for deregulation, ANHD director Benjamin Dulchin notes.

Tishman-Speyer followed a similar business model. It paid a record \$5.4 billion for the complex, expecting to profit by driving out longtime tenants and deregulating rents, but it has not been able to do that fast enough. The property's value has declined to one-third of the purchase price, and Tishman-Speyer has begun to restructure its debt in a way that indicates it is likely to default very soon, Bloomberg News reported in early November.

"The borrowers' equity is currently so far underwater, there's not much point in extending the loan in the hopes that the market will recover quickly enough to service or repay the debt," real-estate lawyer Kevin O'Shea told Bloomberg News. "You'd probably be just delaying the inevitable."

Landlords and their sympathizers called the decision unfair. Owners such as Tishman-Speyer, they claim, relied on the overturned state policy, a 1996 declaration that it was legal in most cases

Continued on page 17

Who Needs a Boss?

While it's practically unheard of for employees in the United States to take back closed factories and reopen them under their own management, workers south of the border have had other ideas.

In Latin America, more than 30,000 workers are employed at businesses that were closed down by owners and reopened by employees as cooperatives, according to Buenos Aires-based journalist Marie Trigona, who has covered the worker self-management movement during the past decade. In Argentina, workers responded to economic collapse in 2001-2002 by taking over abandoned businesses and restarting production without bosses or absentee investors to satisfy. As of 2009, there are an estimated 250 reclaimed businesses in Argentina employing 13,000 workers. There are also about 50 reclaimed factories operating in Brazil and 20 more in Uruguay. In Venezuela, it is estimated that 1,200 business and factories have been reclaimed by its workers after the owners abandoned them. —J.T.

H2Ohhhhh, No You Don't!

Several hundred New Yorkers attended the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) hearing Nov. 10 at Stuyvesant High School in Lower Manhattan to protest the state's plan to allow natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale geologic formation. Permits would be issued to companies using controversial hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling techniques near drinking water sources, such as the Catskill Mountains north of the city. The DEC recently announced an extension for public comments to the draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement from Nov. 30 until Dec. 31.

On Nov. 26, the New York City Council passed a non-binding resolution (Res. 1850) requesting that state policy makers ban the drilling practice within the New York City drinking water watershed. "We can't sell off our water supplies for some short-term financial gain," said Councilmember James Gennaro (D-Queens). Councilmember Tony Avella (D-Queens) proposed another resolution (Res. 2191) that would call for a statewide drilling ban. For more information, go to independent.org. To file a comment online, visit dec.ny.gov/energy/46288.

—JESSICA LEE



WATER DEFENSE: Hundreds rally at a natural gas drilling hearing in Lower Manhattan Nov. 10. PHOTO: JAISAL NOOR

Bloomberg Busts Out the Cash

By STEVEN WISHNIA

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's top campaign strategist, Bradley Tusk, previously worked for Rod Blagojevich and Lehman Brothers. That should tell you a lot.

After ramming legislation through the City Council and then spending more than \$100 million to get a third term, the Mayor relied on a strategist who learned his trade working for the vain and venal deposed Illinois governor and a collapsed Wall Street titan considered arrogant even by the erstwhile Masters of the Universe.

Bloomberg built a machine that combined Chicago-style political muscle with Wall Street billions. Labor unions had a choice — they could get on the bandwagon and be in a good position to get raises, or they could fight a quixotic campaign and be out in the cold for the next four years. Nonprofit groups could get on and collect large donations — or wonder about their funding in the next city budget.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg blanketed the city with propaganda. He would have spent less money if he'd simply bought an iPod nano for each of the 557,000 people who voted for him. His commercials on Yankee postseason games matched those for cars, beer and erectile-dysfunction medications. He bought full back-page ads in scores of neighborhood and ethnic publications for weeks on end — and most of them endorsed him.

The mayor's supporters made much of his supposed "incorruptibility." Bloomberg was so rich, they believed, that he didn't have to hustle for special interests, cutting petty side deals that barnacled the city government.

Instead, Bloomberg would run the city like a corporation, like a CEO. That carried the aura of "competence" — but it ignored the reality of corporate governance. Corporations are run for the profit of those at the top. Bloomberg has certainly done that well. In his eight years as mayor, his personal fortune almost quadrupled, from \$4.5 billion to \$17 billion.

Only the little people take bribes. The real players pay them.

Bloomberg's slogan "Progress, Not Politics" had an Orwellian subtext. In his worldview, "progress" is any change that increases real-estate values, like a luxury condo with high-tech and "green" amenities. "Politics" is a slur to dismiss anyone who disagrees with him. In the corporate world, people who talk back to the CEO usually get five minutes to clean out their desk before security escorts them off the premises.

Meanwhile, under Bloomberg's tenure, the city has lost a net of 190,000 apartments affordable to people who make less than \$37,000 a year — 42 percent of New Yorkers, according to the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy at New York University.

The mayor has often touted his plans to "create or preserve" 165,000 units of affordable housing, but his definition of "affordable" is merely "below market rate." The Bloomberg administration defines "low income" as below about \$40,000

for a single person and \$57,000 for a family of four. One-fifth of the housing slated to be built is designated for households with incomes between roughly \$85,000 and \$192,000 for a family of four. They call this "middle-income."

As of October, the city had built about 35,000 units and preserved 59,000. But Metropolitan Council on Housing organizer Mario Mazzoni says most of the apartments Bloomberg is taking credit for preserving "were already affordable housing, already receiving subsidy. The landlords extorted the city for more money, threatening to turn them into market-rate housing."

For example, when the owner of Independence Plaza North in Tribeca took the complex out of the Mitchell-Lama middle-income program, the Bloomberg administration brokered a deal that let vacant apartments go to market rate and the poorest tenants receive federal Section 8 subsidies. It quietly let the landlord "retroactively" repay tax benefits that required all apartments to be rent-stabilized.

The mayor's policies have undercut any pretense of preserving affordable housing. He donated millions of dollars to the Albany Republicans who have prevented strengthening the state's rent regulations. In 2006, he fired the one Rent Guidelines Board public member who had voted for a rent freeze instead of rubber-stamping another increase.

Some of Bloomberg's statements on housing issues reached Marie Antoinette levels of callousness. At a Working Families Party forum in July, he publicly declared that the 25,000 people evicted every year didn't know how to "manage their budgets," and that the reason homelessness had reached record levels was because his administration had made city shelters "more attractive."

Democratic candidate Bill Thompson came far closer than people expected, taking 46 percent of the vote to Bloomberg's 50.6 percent, but he failed to ignite popular anger about the mayor's policies. Talk to anyone on the street or subway, and you'll likely find them irate about record housing costs. The subway fare has gone up four times under Bloomberg, but it still seems as if half the lines are out of service on weekends. Unemployment in the city has passed 10 percent, the highest since 1993. Hundreds of small businesses are folding, replaced by upscale bars or empty storefronts.

Thompson faced both the classic modern-Democrat dilemma and the racial stereotyping of New York black politicians. Democrats need working-class votes to win elections, but if they campaign on working-class issues, they alienate their funders. Black politicians who speak out forcefully get denounced as "militant," but if they're more mild-mannered, like Thompson, they evoke the archetype of David Dinkins, "the nice guy who dith-



ered while crack dealers terrorized the city." (Dinkins took office in 1990, the year crack-trade wars and an irate ex-boyfriend torching a Bronx social club pushed the city's homicide totals to a record 2,245. The 10,000 new police officers he hired didn't hit the streets until after he'd been defeated by Rudolph Giuliani. Giuliani would then claim that his authoritarian, racial-profiling police tactics were what had reduced crime.)

Yet if Thompson had spoken out more forcefully, would anyone have been listening? The city's three daily newspapers, owned by neocon real-estate speculator Mort Zuckerman, right-wing billionaire Rupert Murdoch, and the indelibly establishmentarian Sulzberger family, all treated Bloomberg's re-election as inevitable. In the tabloids, coverage of the mayoral race was buried well below Sarah Jessica Parker eating a cupcake and Yankee fans getting the team's logo shaved into their hair.

Bloomberg was vulnerable, but he was able to get away with it by projecting an aura of invincibility. President Obama wouldn't even endorse Thompson by name. City Council Speaker Christine Quinn enabled Bloomberg's third-term law and then refused to back Thompson until the last minute. Several key labor unions sat on their hands. They may have positioned their members for small raises, but they helped impose four more years of plutocracy on the working people of the city.

COUNCIL MEMBERS TO KEEP AN EYE ON

By JOHN TARLETON

Being the richest guy in town is not the only reason Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been able to dominate New York politics for the past eight years. The City Council, whose weakness and venality was highlighted by its vote to allow Bloomberg to run for a third term, has also played an enabling role. That may begin to change in January thanks to enraged voters bouncing several pro-Bloomberg incumbents in favor of reformers with strong backgrounds as community organizers. Here are several fresh faces to watch for:

YDANIS RODRIGUEZ DISTRICT 10

—Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill

A longtime neighborhood activist in Washington Heights with roots in the Dominican left, Ydanis Rodriguez has been a staunch defender of public education from his student days at the City University of New York (CUNY). At CUNY, he was a leader in campus building takeovers in 1989 and 1991 to block tuition hikes and an organizer for the unpermitted 10,000-strong student march on City Hall in 1995 that ended in a police riot. Rodriguez founded the Dominican Youth Union and Dominicans 2000 to expand educational opportunities for Dominican youth and has worked as an English-language teacher at Gregorio Luperón High School in Washington Heights for immigrants. After losing City Council races in 2001 and 2003, Rodriguez swept to victory this year following incumbent Councilmember Miguel Martínez's indictment in July on bribery and corruption charges.



MARGARET CHIN DISTRICT 1

—Chinatown, SoHo, South Village, Tribeca, Battery Park City, Greenwich Village

Margaret Chin will be the first Chinese-American to represent Chinatown. She has been fighting for affordable housing and greater access to government services for Chinatown's residents for more than three decades since helping found Asian Americans for Equality as a college student. Chin has also worked as a teacher and college administrator helping immigrant adults get a college education, and served as chairperson for the New York Immigration Coalition.

When a supporter praised her on the night of her Democratic primary victory as someone who will fight for the community, Chin, a former Maoist, replied, "My background is in organizing. I don't do things by myself!"

She will need to remember that if she's going to confront the real-estate industry's designs on her Lower Manhattan district.



JUMAANE WILLIAMS DISTRICT 45

—East Flatbush, Mill Basin, Canarsie

Jumaane Williams has already done New York's long-suffering tenants a favor with his upset victory over landlord-lovin' incumbent Kendall Stewart. There's reason to hope more pleasant surprises are on the way. Williams, 32, is already a veteran of campaigns to improve community services and preserve and create affordable housing in his district. He also served a stint as executive director of Tenants & Neighbors, a statewide tenant advocacy organization. Like several other successful reform candidates, he was heavily supported by the Working Families Party and a number of local labor unions.



DANIEL DROMM DISTRICT 25

—Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Corona, Woodside, Rego Park

An award-winning elementary school teacher, union activist and well-known figure in the Queens LGBT community, Daniel Dromm mobilized an insurgent coalition of gays, Latinos and unionists that knocked off do-nothing incumbent Helen Sears to become the first gay City Councilmember from outside Manhattan, along with fellow reformer Jimmy Van Bramer who won in an adjacent Queens district.

Dromm first made the news in 1992 when he came out as an openly gay schoolteacher in Queens and then successfully defeated several attempts to have him removed from his post. Dromm went on to organize the first Queens LGBT Pride Parade and Festival and cofounded the Queens Chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) and the Queens Pride House. As the shortcomings of Bloomberg's gimmicky educational "reforms" become more evident, Dromm will be well-suited to speak to what a wiser education policy might look like. Hint: It starts with smaller class sizes and more parental involvement.



The Stakes Are High

By JUAN GONZALEZ

With his election to a third term as New York City mayor, billionaire Michael Bloomberg has ensured that the financial capital of the world will remain — at least for the next four years — under the firm control of Wall Street financial firms and the city’s powerful real estate industry.

Never in U.S. history has a single candidate used so much of his own money to trample the democratic process and buy political office.

Bloomberg spent more than \$70 million in each of his first two campaigns, against Mark Green in 2001 and Fernando Ferrer in 2005. This year he has doled out more than \$100 million to defeat a lackluster, poorly financed Democratic opponent, City Comptroller Bill Thompson.

Thanks to all that cash, New Yorkers faced an unprecedented blizzard of Bloomberg commercials, a constant stream of Bloomberg literature in their mailboxes and endless phone calls from Bloomberg’s massive phone-bank operation.

The direct campaign expenses of nearly \$250 million for all three races, however,

Voter participation was so dismal – only 25 percent of the registered voters showed up at the polls – Bloomberg ended up with 200,000 fewer votes than against Ferrer four year ago.

represent only a small portion of Bloomberg’s actual investment in politics. Since deciding to seek the mayor’s post in 2000, he has also distributed about \$100 million annually in philanthropic contributions. Much of that has gone to hundreds of nonprofit organizations located in the five boroughs.

For example, Bloomberg donated \$1 million to Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church. The church’s influential pastor, the Rev. Calvin Butts, subsequently abandoned his friend Thompson to campaign for the mayor.

Bloomberg likewise donated \$600,000 to Harlem Children’s Zone charter schools. Geoffrey Canada, the organization’s director, then interceded with White House aides in the final days of the campaign to convince President Barack Obama not to campaign for Thompson.

Butts and Canada have denied that those huge donations had anything to do with their endorsements. So have scores of nonprofit directors who also received money from Bloomberg and then publicly backed the City Council’s controversial decision last year to overturn term limits so that Bloomberg could run for a third term.

Given the current economic crisis and the financial strains so many nonprofits face these days, it is hard to imagine the leaders of those organizations mustering the courage to oppose a big benefactor.

Surprisingly, the election turned out to be very close, when you consider all Bloomberg spent, his power as an incumbent and the near -unanimous support he enjoyed from all the major newspapers in town. He received only 50.6 percent of the vote, less

than 5 percent over Thompson’s 46 percent.

Voter participation was so dismal — only 25 percent of the registered voters showed up at the polls — that Bloomberg ended up with 200,000 fewer votes than he received when he defeated Ferrer four year ago.

The slim margin reflects the deep alienation many New Yorkers feel after eight years of the Bloomberg era. Perhaps no chief executive in the city’s modern history has displayed more disdain for the needs of working-class New Yorkers.

Bloomberg’s campaign repeatedly stressed how he has dramatically improved public-school performance, overhauled city government with technological innovation and efficient business practices, revitalized city neighborhoods improved the quality of life for New Yorkers and been a careful steward of city finances.

In some respects, his administration has revealed an enlightened view of government’s role. His ban on smoking in public places, his adding scores of new bicycle lanes throughout the city and his many efforts to defuse racial tensions have been welcomed by many residents.

But those few accomplishments pale next to Bloomberg’s unprecedented effort to centralize the functions of city government, to run roughshod over the voices of local community leaders and parents and to shovel public subsidies to the city’s financial and real estate barons.

Bloomberg refused to intercede as hundreds of thousands of rent-stabilized and Mitchell-Lama housing units were gobbled up by private-equity firms and turned into market-rate housing.

He has repeatedly supported projects that gave away public spaces and government subsidies for luxury developments.

The new Yankee and Mets stadiums, Columbia University’s proposed biotech center, the vast rezoning of Williamsburg-Greenpoint and Hudson Yards in Manhattan, the Willets Point redevelopment in Queens, the Forest City Ratner project in downtown Brooklyn and the Related Company’s Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx are just a few of these mega-projects that have sucked up enormous public subsidies and benefited developers over local residents.

Now that the real-estate boom has turned to bust, many of those projects have stalled, and the bill is about to come due.

Land policy is likely to explode during his third term. In the next four years, it will be up to the public to keep an eye on Bloomberg’s ongoing policies.

Another area is the increasing computerization of government. Under Bloomberg, who made his fortune with a computerized financial-news system, city agencies spent billions for new computer systems that have not delivered what they promised and have mushroomed in cost — beginning with the new 91 1 system. Many of those contracts were awarded with little or no bidding. It’s a scandal waiting to be unearthed.

The mayor’s biggest claim has been improving the school system. But as more independent reviews come out of his reforms — from charter schools to improved test scores — proof mounts that much of the progress is smoke and mirrors. City test scores could prove to be as reliable as all those Triple-A-rated subprime mortgages Bloomberg’s Wall Street friends peddled.

Juan Gonzalez is New York City-based investigative journalist and co-host of the radio/TV news show Democracy Now!

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Cashing in on the Housing Crisis

By Alex Kane

The white, concrete 30-story luxury condominium building in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, towers over the neighborhood. The structure’s glass windows shine, though only a few units have lights on. Known as the Forte Condos, its construction began in the waning days of the real-estate boom, and it sits as a relic of a lost era.

The building on Ashland and Fulton streets has run into trouble. At least 60 percent of its units are vacant, even after apartment prices were slashed by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Majority equity holder Goldman Sachs and developer Clarett Group have relinquished control of the building to the bank, Eurohypo AG.

But Forte Condos is not an anomaly. It is one of some 600 stalled or largely empty condominiums located throughout the city, according to preliminary data released by Right to the City New York (RTTC NY), a coalition of local grassroots organizations pushing the city to convert unused luxury units or stalled construction sites into low-income housing.

A full report, with detailed information on these buildings — their foreclosure status, the price of units on the market and more — is scheduled to be released later this year by RTTC NY and the Urban Justice Center’s Community Development Project.

“These buildings stand as symbols of the greed of Wall Street,” said City Councilmember Letitia James (D-Brooklyn), who is affiliated with the Working Families Party and represents Clinton Hill and Fort Greene. James is teaming up with RTTC NY, which includes groups such as Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Picture the Homeless and Mothers on the Move, to press their demands for affordable housing.

THE GREAT DISPLACEMENT

“Everywhere you look, throughout the five boroughs in poor low-income communities, there was a ton of luxury condos being built, and the luxury [buildings were] replacing low-income housing,” said John Tyus, a member of the Brooklyn-based activist group FUREE.

Housing activists say that the need for affordable housing is greater than ever — almost 200,000 units of low-income rental units in New York City have been lost over

the past eight years. The glut of luxury development — a result of gentrification, the speculative real-estate market and rezoning — should be given to people in dire need of housing. More than 125,000 people remain on a waiting list for Section 8 vouchers in New York City.

“Our government bailed out the banks and neglected its people, and those very same banks are financing many of these condominium projects,” said Rob Robinson, a board member and housing organizer with Picture the Homeless. “It’s time to make data like this public to demand that this housing go towards low-income and poor people.”

In a project that took six months of canvassing and documenting the status of luxury condo buildings in low-income neighborhoods in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, RTTC NY found that there are 126 troubled condo buildings in downtown Brooklyn, the largest number out of the neighborhoods they surveyed.

“Municipalities prefer to have upper-income housing because that improves their tax base,” said David Harvey, a professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Harvey is one of several academics who works with RTTC.

“There’s not a natural market for it, in the sense that people [don’t] have the incomes to go live in those high-income condominiums, [so] the tendency is to bridge that gap between what people can afford and what they need to get into housing by greater indebtedness,” Harvey said. “So, we’ve been seeing an incredible increase in indebtedness, in general, over the last 20 or 30 years of neoliberalism.”

RTTC NY is part of the nationwide Right to the City alliance, which is active in nine cities in the United States and works to fight gentrification and displacement in urban areas.

The empty or stalled projects have caught the eye of State Assemblymember Hakeem Jeffries (D-Brooklyn), who is also working with RTTC NY. Jeffries, who conducted his own survey and found 66 stalled, vacant or partially occupied luxury buildings in his district, has launched what he is calling “Project Reclaim,” an initiative to convert luxury housing into affordable housing. He has introduced legislation in Albany which would give the New York State Mortgage Insurance Fund the power to refinance that conversion. The bill is currently in the Assembly’s Housing Committee and cospon-



HOUSING CASUALTY: John Tyus of Right to the City New York stands in front of one of some 600 stalled or largely empty luxury sites around New York City. The coalition is demanding that troubled condos be converted into affordable housing. PHOTO: THOMAS MARCZEWSKI

sored by 22 other Assembly members,

“The luxury condominium steamroller has threatened to overrun low-income and working families all throughout New York City,” Jeffries said at an Oct. 27 rally kicking off RTTC NY’s condo-conversion campaign.

TROUBLED CONDOS

But while the grassroots organizations that make up the RTTC coalition applaud Jeffries’ efforts, they say a separate city proposal to combat troubled condominiums is only a first step, and are demanding changes so that the proposal would help poor people.

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) unveiled the Housing Asset Renewal Program (HARP) last July, saying that the \$20 million pilot program would turn troubled condominiums and market-rate rental units into as many as 400 units of affordable housing.

In a July 8 press release, Bloomberg said that HARP would transform “what would have been market-rate buildings into affordable housing for working class New Yorkers.”

However, housing activists say HARP’s income parameters are set too high, that the program needs more money and that their rent restrictions only apply for 30 years. In the program, a family of four must make less than \$126,720 a year to qualify, and a single renter must make less than \$68,810 to qualify. It remains unclear whether developers will bite or just wait out the bad real-estate market.

The official New York City poverty line, which is slightly higher than the federal government’s poverty line, is \$26,138 for a family of four and \$12,114 for a single person.

Councilmember James says she is currently in discussion with HPD and Quinn about lowering the income targets to reflect a given area’s median income. In Bushwick, which has 108 troubled luxury buildings, according to RTTC NY, the median household income is just above \$30,000. HPD Press Secretary Eric Bederman wrote in an email that HPD conducted a meeting with RTTC NY last month, and that they “are aware of their concerns. We look forward to receiving their full report and reviewing their findings when it is complete.”

“The fight right now is to make HARP a better program,” said Mario Mazzoni, an organizer with the tenants’ rights group Metropolitan Council on Housing. He believes that there are other ways to create truly affordable housing from the luxury housing stock, such as having the city acquire troubled sites and turning them over to a nonprofit or tenant group.

“People are appalled because these properties are being built in their backyard and they’re being displaced,” said Robinson of Picture the Homeless. “They’re being sent to other places around the city, but quite frankly, it’s hard to settle anywhere in the city, because the same process is happening in all of the boroughs.”

To learn more, visit indypendent.org to view a video about Right to the City New York.

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A Fresh Education Threatened

By JENNIFER BROOKLAND

For South Bronx kids used to seeing chicken fried in a cardboard bucket, spending recess with 15 live hens is an unusual lesson. The chickens are part of St. Augustine School's growing number of "green" projects, with plans for a greenhouse and a self-sustaining tilapia pond in the works.

"They eat the noodles like people do!" exclaimed Brianna Manning, 7, as the hens slurped up a giant pile of spaghetti and meatballs, canned peas and fruit gleefully dumped into their coop by Brianna's first-grade class.

St. Augustine sits in the middle of Morrisania, part of the poorest Congressional district in the country. Ninety-eight percent of the school's kindergarten through eighth grade students qualify for free lunch, and access to fresh produce is extremely limited.

But with a funding shortfall of \$1.5 million, the school, and its environmental programs, are in serious jeopardy.

The programs started piecemeal — first came the community garden in 2004, where

a former student. The seventh-grader would talk back, even threatening his grandmother. Then Brady put Ken in charge of feeding the chickens three times a day and his grades jumped from Fs to Cs and his behavior improved.

Students are also able to learn about healthy eating habits, which are rare in a neighborhood where 27 percent of adults are obese and 16 percent suffer from diabetes.

"Sometimes the eggs are warm when they just come out of the chicken," said seventh-grader Cynthia Galdamez. She often wraps one in a tissue and takes it home, two blocks down the street. Cynthia's mom, who was excited about the chicken program because it reminded her of growing up in El Salvador, said the eggs taste better than any she could buy at a supermarket.

Everything is used. Neighbors collect chicken waste to spread as fertilizer on their gardens. Needy families take home the bulk of the eggs. With the additional protein and fresh garden vegetables, Brady said some kids no longer relied on the St. Augustine food pantry.



'THE CHICKEN GUY': Michael Brady, the fundraising director at St. Augustine, says the school's 15 hens show students that a more sustainable world is possible. PHOTO: JOSCELYN JURICH

kids and neighbors grew rhubarb, red-skinned potatoes, peas and collard greens. Then the students started harvesting honey from beehives kept by a local gardener.

"Education is more than reading, writing and arithmetic. It's understanding that we are stewards of this earth," said Principal Kathryn Trapp.

When the chickens arrived at St. Augustine last September, each homeroom named a chicken. Now Ruby, Monica, Mary and Dymphna — named for the patron saint of mental and nervous disorders — spend their time eating leftovers from the school cafeteria and the rectory.

"The goal is to make us as self-sustainable as possible and to give our kids a sense of ownership over what they produce," said Michael Brady, the school's fundraising director. Some students call him "Mr. Brady." To others, he's "the chicken guy."

While students study the connection between the weather and egg production and learn about poultry life cycles, the hens provide more than a science class.

Kids with disciplinary or emotional problems receive "chicken therapy." According to Brady, taking responsibility for the birds has led some students to improve not just their behavior but their grades, too.

"Ken was a handful," Brady said, recalling



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WHY SEATTLE STILL MATTERS

By JOHN TARLETON

It was still pitch dark outside and a thin, cold mist was in the air when the affinity groups charged with blockading Sixth Avenue and Union Street met for the last time. Scouts reported that the coast was clear. Sitting in the wooden pews of an old downtown Seattle church we reviewed our target once more. After days of nerve-racking preparation, we were ready to do our part to shut down the World Trade Organization (WTO).

A colorful procession of 80 people left the church, papier-mâché butterflies hovering overhead as we walked quietly toward the WTO meeting site. When we arrived at the intersection, the police remained frozen in their position across the way. And just like that, the intersection was ours.

Those of us who were prepared to be arrested locked arms and sat down on the wet pavement in front of the police line. Dancers and drummers soon filled the rest of the intersection as the butterflies bobbed above the festive throng.

Similar carnival-like scenes were unfolding throughout downtown Seattle on Nov. 30, 1999, as thousands of people poured into the streets while government ministers and corporate lobbyists found themselves trapped in their luxury hotels. Laid-off steelworkers and tree-huggers marched side by side. Critics of sweatshops and genetically engineered foods made common cause with farmers from France and South Korea, indigenous peoples from throughout the Americas and opponents of oil drilling in the Niger Delta.

Even then, the fog of media misreporting was thicker than the tear gas unleashed by the local police. Today, the Seattle WTO protests are eerily relevant as the dangers foretold a decade ago about the workings of global capitalism have come to pass, yet remain unaddressed.

TWO VISIONS

The goal of the Nov. 30 direct action was to shut down talks at a WTO ministerial meeting in which the world's wealthiest nations sought to impose a global trade agreement that would have greatly empowered large corporations at the expense of local communities around the world. Almost any social, economic or environmental legislation that hindered profit-making would be defined as an "illegal trade barrier."

Two visions of globalization — one top



LOCKING ARMS: On Nov. 30, 1999, thousands of opponents of corporate-led globalization non-violently took control of the streets in downtown Seattle. PHOTO: STEPHANIE GREENWOOD

down and authoritarian, the other grassroots and bottom-up — collided in Seattle, and the rest became history: barrages of tear gas and rubber bullets, shattered storefront windows, the National Guard called in to suppress the protests, almost 600 people jailed, the collapse of the talks on the final night of the summit when African and Caribbean delegates stood up to the demands of the rich nations.

Chants of "This is what democracy looks like!" could be heard rippling through the crowds as the week progressed and by the time the WTO left town a global "movement of movements," which had pre-dated Seattle by many years in countries of the Global South, had gained worldwide attention.

So, what did it all mean?

For the WTO, Seattle was a debacle from which it is still trying to recover a decade later (see sidebar).

In the United States, the protests elicited wildly divergent responses. Sixties-era radical Tom Hayden hailed Seattle as the harbinger of a new era of social justice activism while establishment mouthpiece Thomas Friedman derided "the Seattle circus" as "a Noah's ark of flat-earth advocates." The U.K.-based *Economist* put a forlorn-looking Asian girl on its cover and announced that the real losers in Seattle were the world's poor, which the WTO sought to assist.

The U.S. public's understanding of what had happened was heavily influenced by the repeated use of images of a small group of

black-clad protesters operating on the periphery of the demonstration smashing the windows of chain stores like Starbucks, Niketown and the Gap. The notoriety these actions gained sparked passionate debates among activists about whether the actions of the "Black Bloc" had helped or harmed the protests.

Still, despite such controversies, it felt as if a door had unexpectedly flown open. We got a glimpse of a just, sustainable world that, for once, seemed obtainable. At a time when U.S. wealth and power was at its zenith, many thousands of young people in this country began to actively question how that wealth was being created and to what end. Inspired in part by Seattle, they formed direct action affinity groups, legal and medical first-aid collectives, Indymedia centers that offered anyone the chance to be a citizen journalist, newspapers like *The Independent* and much more. A series of protests rolled across the globe during the next two years wherever world leaders gathered. It seemed we had the bastards on the run. But, much of these efforts were built on faulty assumptions.

TACTICS AND STRATEGY

Shutting down the WTO was intoxicating but impossible to duplicate without the element of surprise. The police would never be caught unprepared again. Protesters confused a single tactic ("Shut it down!") for a strategy and then allowed it to become an

end in itself. Longer-range organizing rooted in speaking to people's everyday concerns (which contributed greatly to success in Seattle) was rarely practiced in the U.S. wing of the global justice movement. That the movement was middle class and had minimal participation by people of color further isolated it.

Chronic weaknesses of the postmodern left — an aversion to any form of power as inherently evil and a consequent lack of organization and resources — were embraced. This was exacerbated by an over-reliance on consensus-based decision-making, which requires unanimous agreement among group members. In such a hothouse environment where everyone can debate everything and anyone can block a decision, it becomes easy to think that sitting through an intense four-hour meeting was *the* revolution when it was just a needlessly long meeting.

OTHER CHANNELS

The September 11 attacks exposed all these weaknesses. Finding its freewheeling street protests suddenly out of fashion, the global justice movement in the United States had nothing deeper to keep it rooted. It dissolved into its constituent parts. Many individual participants turned their full attention to locally based projects.

As for me, I immersed myself in my work as the coordinator of this newspaper, which I joined shortly after its inception in the fall of 2000. Memories of Seattle quickly receded as Bush administration calamities (Iraq, Katrina, lack of action on global warming, etc.) piled up, while here in New York a billionaire mayor aggressively pushed a neoliberal agenda of gentrification and privatization.

Looking for other channels to express their values, people continued to mobilize on a massive scale from the antiwar movement that crested in the run-up to Iraq Invasion to the Anybody But Bush push that brought a half-million people into the streets of New York during the 2004 Republican National Convention and saw thousands of volunteers journey to swing states to canvass for Bush's opponent. In 2008 the Obama campaign used the latest social media technologies to harness the participation of an unprecedented number of campaign volunteers who fervently hoped the young Illinois senator would lead a shift away from business as usual in this country.

Instead, Obama has responded to the worst economic downturn in 80 years by turning to many of the same Wall Street insiders who created the mess. The media have settled back into their role as cheerleader for a rising stock market index. Through it all, the left has been mostly quiet while the protest void has been filled by fringe right-wing groups.

Protesting cannot substitute for the hard work of organizing broad-based social movements. However, 10 years after the Seattle uprising, a similarly vibrant, hopeful spirit of resistance is needed — more urgently than ever. While naive in some ways, we were the true realists about the things that really matter, like creating an economy that benefits the many, not just the few. It is the free-market ideologues who were deluded.

John Tarleton is the Associate Editor of Clarion, the newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress, a progressive union that represents the 22,000 faculty and professional staff at City University of New York (psc-cuny.org).

WTO: AT IT AGAIN

Trade ministers from the 153 member nations of will meet at WTO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland starting Nov. 30.

The top priority is to advance negotiations on new rules to govern agricultural, industrial and services sectors. Incredibly, the WTO is seeking further deregulation of the financial sector. "[This] will further ... spread risky financial products, which caused the financial crisis in the first place, while needed supervision and regulation is not yet in place," says Our World Is Not For Sale, a network of more than 200 civil society groups that is fighting the current corporate globalization model. The Obama administration recently joined other wealthy Group of 20 nations in calling for the WTO talks to be successfully concluded. —J.T.



WHAT A BLAST: A Seattle police officer fires pepper spray into a line of seated protesters. The authorities were unprepared for the WTO demonstrators' creative, decentralized tactics. PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/DJBONES

Puppets and People Power

For someone like David Solnit, the best forms of protest put art into strategic action. A key organizer of the 1999 WTO shutdown and a long-time antiwar activist in the Bay Area, Solnit has helped create puppets, costumes and props to bring political messages alive in the streets. But activism is also about precision: Targeting the pillars that hold up power structures. Solnit is again at the center of things as he helps pull together a day of direct action against climate change Nov. 30, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. *The Independent's* Jessica Lee snagged him away from organizing for a few minutes to reflect on this political moment.

JESSICA LEE: *The protests in Seattle, and subsequent demonstrations since then against the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and trade meetings of the most powerful nations are moments when people shed single-issue politics to focus on fighting oppressive and destructive global systems. How can a global grassroots campaign be sustained outside on demonstrating at these large meetings?*

DAVID SOLNIT: Strong summit mobilizations come out of ongoing campaigns, and are the culmination of movement building in our communities. They are not a substitute for them. The institutions we are fighting have many millions of people organized to maintain the status quo and keep us down. I think

we have to out-organize them by joining or forming ongoing grassroots organizations, alliances, networks and movements that can wage campaigns that have both winnable goals that improve our lives and assert people power and also keep our eyes on the prize of systemic change.

JL: *You are involved in organizing the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice Nov. 30. How are the problems caused by global warming and the hope for climate justice related to what was being fought for in Seattle?*

DS: Climate change or global warming and other ecological crises are the result of the same economic system that is at the root of economic injustice and poverty, and of war. Climate is the WTO of this decade—the central arena in the battle between social movements fighting for a better world and globalized corporate capitalism pursuing its doomsday mission of endless growth to concentrate power and wealth. If corporations get their way, carbon trading will be the biggest speculative investor casino bubble-waiting-to-pop in history, bigger than all other markets combined. Climate change is systemic and whether climate justice movements or corporations and their governments and NGO's win will determine the framework for all our struggles—antiwar, economic justice and human rights.

JL: *What are the key pillars that uphold the*

current destructive climate policies? What would a people-powered strategy look like and how could it be effective?

DS: Because the root causes of climate change are so vast and because we can't wait till governments to make and then enforce agreements, it's important to develop a people power strategy. Think about these three questions: Ask what are the key pillars responsible for creating climate change/chaos?; What would effective campaigns to weaken or remove those pillars be? This may involve identifying the pillars of the pillars; then ask what your organization or community is best placed to take on? People are already taking on the key pillars we are likely to come up with: fossil fuels and energy; agriculture and food; transportation and buildings; military and war. Having a big picture people power climate justice strategy could link them all these movements together into a systemic strategy, like how the one day, one city strategy of shutting down the WTO put dozens of blockades and occupations into a bigger strategy. One hopeful place this may develop is at the next U.S. Social Forum, with its call for Peoples Movement Assemblies.

JL: *In your new book, The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle (AK Press), you chronicle the campaign of a movement to own its own history against those who want to unfairly claim it or rewrite it. As the climate jus-*



DAVID SOLNIT. PHOTO: © JACQUES-JEAN TIZIOU/COMMUNITY.JJTIZIOU.ORG

tice movement gains momentum, what lessons can be learned from Seattle so its history can be preserved? Why is this important?

DS: What we think happened in the past shapes the future. Letting elites re-write past movement history — like “the Sixties” or Seattle WTO — can let them take away our hard-fought lessons that ordinary people have power to make change. Taking documentation, analysis and celebration of our own history as seriously as we do resistance and creating alternatives is key.

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By ARUN GUPTA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY MARTIN

Don't believe that politicians and corporations lack the will to address climate change. They have the will to deny the science of climate change, the will to sabotage negotiations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the will to foist half-baked schemes on us to address global calamity.

This is why Copenhagen will not be a failure. It will be a stunning success. The wealthy and powerful have succeeded in blocking, for now, the shift to a society, economy and polity that sustains the vast breadth of humanity and the planet.

Instead, we will be given shoddy fixes. One will be a technological fix, geoengineering, which has been described as "hacking the planet." The second will be a market fix, cap and trade, which aims to turn pollution into a tradable commodity in a new privatized atmosphere. The aim of both is to sustain extractive industries, the fossil-fuel

economy, consumer capitalism and globalized inequality and deprivation. Moreover, both fixes will give the appearance, but not essence, of urgent action; create new modes of accumulation for industrial and financial capital; and accelerate ecological devastation.

So what is geoengineering? In a broad sense it is manipulation of the biosphere. By this definition, we have been geoengineering the earth over the last 250 years by spewing nearly 500 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere.

There are two forms of geoengineering. One would alter the "albedo," or the ratio of sunlight reflected back into space. The other involves scrubbing the atmosphere of excess carbon and storing it. Managing solar radiation works faster, but the drawbacks are greater than carbon capture and storage.

The proposals sound like science fiction: launching a trillion mirrors into space to shade the earth, deploying fleets of robotic

ships to spray saltwater mist to brighten clouds, erecting artificial forests to filter atmospheric carbon, juicing the oceans with iron to stimulate phytoplankton that will gorge on carbon.

All are untested, and all have known drawbacks and unknown consequences and would turn the atmosphere into one more human artifact to be managed by bureaucrats and capitalists. But it's already started. Technology firms from California to Australia are dumping iron and urea in the ocean, recycling carbon dioxide emissions and capturing carbon from the air. The potential market for these fixes ranges from tens of billions of dollars to trillions. The payoff is being able to sell the results as "offsets" in carbon-trading markets. And guess who foots the bill?

To even consider such risky ventures assumes we are too weak and shortsighted to stop mining gold, driving cars or torching rainforests, but we are mighty and wise

enough to reconfigure the entire planet to fit our desires. Then again, it's easier to imagine the end of the world, as the pedestrian blockbuster *2012* does, than an end to driving SUVs to big-box stores to buy more junk we don't need.

There is a virtual inevitability to geoengineering. On the one hand, capitalism can continue business as usual, on the other it can create a new industry at the public's expense. Plus, with no regulation in place, any company, government or billionaire is free to start geoengineering the earth.

Prominent government bodies including the National Academy of Sciences and Britain's Royal Society, have been holding workshops and releasing studies on geoengineering. Last year, the Council on Foreign Relations held a workshop on with the ominous title, "Unilateral Planetary Scale Geoengineering."

Ready or not, here comes Earth 2.0.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

In *Carbon Trading*, perhaps the definitive work on the subject, Larry Lohmann writes that "there is only one way of addressing the climate crisis: to keep most remaining coal, oil and gas in the ground."

Reducing greenhouse gases to the level where they no longer threaten cataclysm means "net negative emissions," which involves phasing out coal, engaging in continental-scale reforestation and radically different agricultural practices and figuring out how to sequester huge amounts of carbon safely for millennia.

But this would mean a completely new global political economy based on sharing resources and reducing inequality. This terrifies the rich.

So rather than offering a plan for slashing carbon emissions, at Copenhagen they will demand carbon trading and offsets as the cure-all.

Trading pollution was pioneered in the United States decades ago, and its supporters, such as liberal oracle Paul Krugman, always cite trading in sulfur dioxide as a stellar case of an efficient pollution market.

Yet, proponents rarely acknowledge that this market was extremely narrow, involving one polluting gas and a few hundred participants, industrial polluters. The rights were given away for free, amounting to billions in public subsidies. The actual reductions were modest, and absolutely no innovation was spurred in alternative energies or conservation. Coal still accounts for roughly half of all U.S. power generation.

Other systems such as the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme have been unqualified failures for reducing emissions but smashing successes for increasing profits. One study by the NGO International Rivers found that some 76 percent of projects approved under the CDM had already been completed. In essence, these projects would have happened anyway so they provide no additional emissions reduction. It's just an accounting trick.

Advocates of carbon trading contend there can be a manageable global market where projects to reduce emissions can be properly evalu-

ated, instituted, measured, regulated, managed and then traded for profit free of corruption. This flies in the face of decades of epic fraud and corruption in global financial markets.

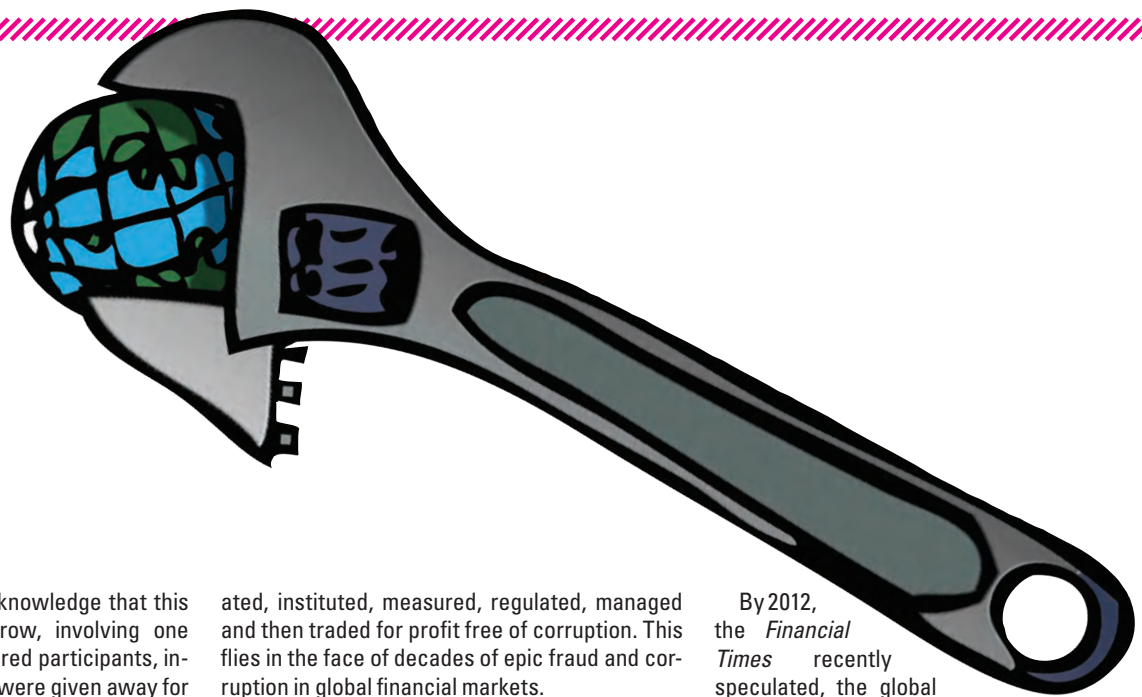
For example, Lohmann discusses the pop group Coldplay's release of *A Rush of Blood to the Head*. The band said it would "offset" part of the album's carbon footprint by planting 10,000 mango trees in southern India. It turned out that half the trees had never been distributed or were dead within a few years.

In the world of offsets, this qualifies as a success story. In a case involving General Motors, Chevron and American Electrical Power, the Nature Conservancy purchased 50,000 acres of Brazilian Atlantic forest in 2002 either to use as offsets or to trade. Local and native communities who used the land for food and materials have been banned from the forest.

According to *Mother Jones*, the international carbon market developed under Kyoto "now accounts for more than \$126 billion in offset transactions."

By 2012, the *Financial Times* recently speculated, the global carbon trading market could amount to \$1.2 trillion if the United States commits to a cap-and-trade system. Virtually every investment bank in the world has a carbon trading division; it could be the largest commodities market in the world by 2020, and outfits like the New York Stock Exchange, J.P. Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs are developing "carbon-trading platforms."

The goal of carbon trading and geoengineering is twofold: new areas of profit, and new forms of enclosure that turn the entire biosphere itself into commodity units; forest, farmlands and oceans, mainly in the global south, will be seized under these markets because property rights will be enshrined above all else. Ultimately, even the sky will be commodified by turning the carbon cycle itself into a tradable, privately owned asset.



7 Ways to Geoengineer the Earth



SOLUTION: THE MATRIX
Use high-altitude weather balloons, airplanes and even naval guns to disperse sulfate particles into the stratosphere to block sunlight. This is based on the effects of the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, which injected an estimated 20 million tons of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere, cooling the planet by 0.5 degrees Celsius for more than a year.

DRAWBACKS: Arctic ozone depletion; a more acidic environment; decreased soil moisture and rainfall; uneven regional effects; impact on Asia's monsoons, which could prove disastrous for billions; unknown effects on photosynthesis; reduced effectiveness of solar power; no change in increasing ocean acidification; and the need to keep the sulfate pump working continuously.

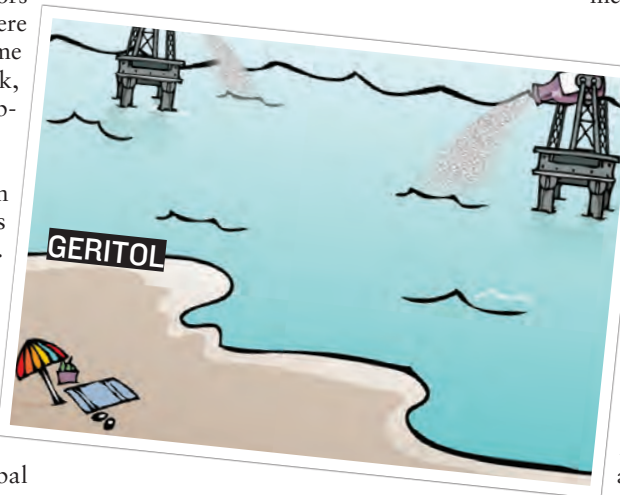
SOLUTION: SUNSHIELD
Launch a trillion mirrors or more into space where they would reflect some of the sunlight back, thus reducing the global mean temperature.

DRAWBACKS: The cost could be in the hundreds of trillions of dollars (makes the Wall Street bailout look like peanuts). There are the usual hazards of decreasing solar radiation, such as no effect on ocean acidification and less solar power. Then there's the fact that the global water cycle is more sensitive to a change in solar radiation than the carbon cycle. Simply put, lowering temperatures to the pre-industrial norm would push global

rainfall below the norm. And the sunshield could be used as a weapon. Imagine the Pentagon threatening to block a "rogue nation's" sunlight.

SOLUTION: GERITOL
Dump iron filings in the oceans to spawn blooms of phytoplankton that soak up carbon dioxide via photosynthesis. The theory is that when the phytoplankton die they will sink to lower depths carrying the carbon with them. At least two California companies, Planktos and Climos, are already trying to cash in by selling ocean fertilization as offsets.

DRAWBACKS: The only way to test ocean fertilization is to do it on a massive scale for decades in an environment in constant flux, making it extremely difficult to measure results. Effects include nutrient robbing and oxygen depletion. According to *Nature*, the weekly science journal, "even if the entire Southern Ocean were fertilized forever with iron" this would



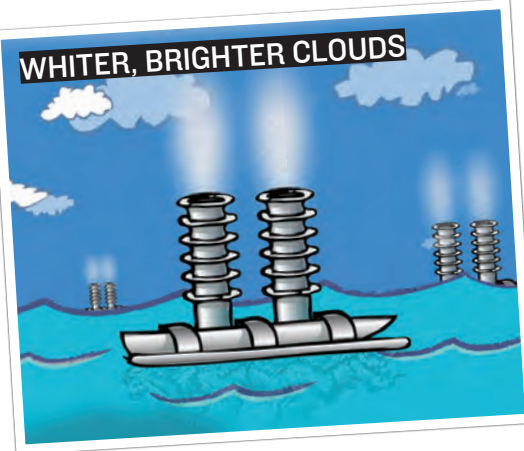
sequester only one-eighth of the carbon now being generated annually.

Another recent *Nature* study found that in one case of natural iron fertilization, the amount of carbon sequestered in lower depths "was almost 80 times smaller than the amount that scientists had determined during a similar study." In other words, it doesn't work.

SOLUTION: FANTASY ISLANDS
Construct huge white, plastic islands and float them in the oceans to mimic the reflectivity of polar ice. Melting ice is one critical feedback loop that is speeding up warming. Snow-covered ice reflects up to 85 percent of solar radiation, while open water reflects a paltry 7 percent. So as sea ice melts, the ocean absorbs more heat, causing more ice to melt.

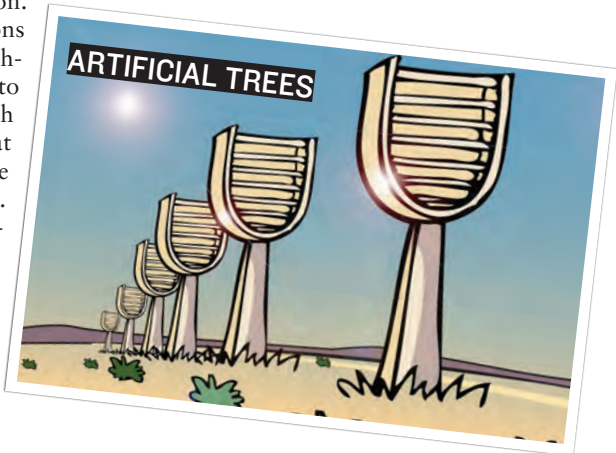
DRAWBACKS: The amount of area to be covered could amount to hundreds of thousands of square miles, resulting in an immense and expensive engineering project. It's uncertain how this would affect weather patterns and sea life under the islands. The growth and shrinkage of northern sea ice plays a critical role in heat transfer from the oceans to the atmosphere, which is already affecting weather patterns throughout the northern hemisphere, whereas fake islands would remain fixed in size and place.

SOLUTION: WHITER, BRIGHTER CLOUDS
Known as "marine cloud brightening," this technique involves deploying thousands of robotic ships to spray atomized saltwater mist into the lower



offset the global warming expected from a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide, which we're quickly headed toward.

DRAWBACKS: Apart from the usual problems of tinkering with sunlight, the effects would likely be regionalized. According to *Nature*, brighter clouds also cool only during the day and do best in summer, whereas global warming is an around-the-clock phenomenon. There are questions about whether it is technologically possible to create small enough salt droplets and what the feedback would be on the cloud layers. Since all sorts of climatic activity is driven by temperature differences between the land and oceans, no one knows how weather patterns will be affected.



SOLUTION: ARTIFICIAL TREES
Klaus Lackner, a physicist at Columbia University, has teamed up with Global Research Technologies in Arizona to construct artificial trees coated in an absorbent material like limewater to bind with carbon dioxide. The carbon would then be removed and stored in used gas and oil reservoirs where it would supposedly stay put for eons.

DRAWBACKS: Cost is a huge issue. Britain's Institution of Mechanical Engineers estimates in a new report that it would take 10 million trees at about \$20,000 each to absorb just one-eighth of carbon dioxide produced annually. Removing half the world's carbon dioxide by this method comes to \$800 billion and the report notes this is only 20 percent of the costs, with most of the expense coming from "recovery from the sorbent filter material." Plus there are unknowns as to whether captured and stored carbon would actually stay in the ground; if it started to leak on a large scale, warming could snap back.



SOLUTION: MOVE THE EARTH
This is the most outlandish idea, while admittedly tongue in cheek. Writing in the journal *Astrophysics and Space Science* in 2001, three scientists described how to "slingshot" an asteroid about half the size of Long Island past Jupiter and then the Earth, transferring the orbital energy in the process. Voilà! Earth's orbit is nudged about 30 miles further out, reducing incoming solar radiation. Repeat as needed.

DRAWBACKS: The asteroid could cause a speed-up in the Earth's rotation; the asteroid's tidal bulge would be 10 times the force of the moon's, "leading to likely tsunamis, immense storms and other disruptions"; other planets may have to be moved as the Earth is moved, which could destabilize the whole solar system; "it seems that the Moon will be lost from Earth orbit during this process"; and a wayward asteroid could smack into the Earth, effectively sterilizing the biosphere of life.



ACTION FROM BELOW: Climate camp activists protest the coal-fired Hazelwood Power Station Sept. 12 in Australia. PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/HAZELWOOD2009

BY BRYAN FARRELL

Hundreds of climate activists swarmed down a hill toward Britain's largest coal-burning power plant Oct. 17 with the intention of shutting it down. Within minutes, dozens had broken through the perimeter fence, erected specifically for this protest, and entered the site, known as Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station.

But 650 police officers rapidly secured the breach and over the next six hours battled about 300 activists determined to topple other sections of the fence.

While a few broke through again to block the main gates and occupy railway tracks, many were injured by police batons or dog bites. By the next day, 57 arrests had been made without a single service interruption at the plant.

Nonetheless, organizers of the event

The Hot Topic

— dubbed the Great Climate Swoop — considered their effort a “massive success.” In a press statement, Natasha Blair, from Camp for Climate Action, said, “We’ve achieved what we came here to do: to show that coal has no future and there is a growing movement which is prepared to take action on climate change.”

British climate activists have been stressing this message for a few years now. In fact, the storming of Ratcliffe came on the heels of a recent announcement by German energy corporation E.ON that it was shelving plans to build Britain's first new coal-fired power station in 30 years. Although the company blamed the recession, climate activists believe their work was a deciding factor.

Groups like the anarchist-influenced Camp for Climate Action, known for its week-long gatherings of mostly young people that end in direct action, and the suffragette-inspired Climate Rush have worked with international fixtures like Greenpeace since 2007 to wage a campaign against E.ON. They've shut down a coal conveyor belt, blockaded company headquarters in Nottingham, occupied the roof of the PR firm it employs and won a major criminal trial using climate change as a legal defense.

Due to such widespread and effective activ-

ism, many see Britain as a climate movement leader. British weekly political magazine *The New Statesman* recently said, “Climate change activism is more developed in this country than anywhere else in the world.”

Some argue, however, that this perception might be different if developing countries had the same media access as the industrialized world. International groups like Rising Tide and Rainforest Action Network (RAN) continually stress climate organizing by indigenous communities and people of color.

The Great Climate Swoop got more coverage than an even larger action in Thailand last month, which saw 4,000 people in the streets outside the U.N. Climate Talks in Bangkok. Many had come from as far away as Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

“Climate change should always be looked at as a justice issue,” said RAN's Joshua Kahn Russell. Since its founding in 1985, RAN has lent its expertise in finance campaigning — going after banks that invest in projects like rainforest destruction — to native communities fighting on the frontlines.

“We have no illusion that we're a mostly white NGO from the States,” he said. “We consider ourselves justice-minded climate activists, as opposed to climate justice activists.”

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At the Energy Crossroads

BY ROBERT S. ESHELMAN

In late October, West Virginia-based Massey Energy began mountaintop removal mining operations on Coal River Mountain, the last intact peak in the bucolic Coal River Valley of southern West Virginia. Massey's actions are the latest in the coal industry's legacy of ecological devastation of the Appalachian Mountains, where more than 500 mountaintops have been leveled and 2,000 miles of rivers and streams have been filled with often-toxic mountaintop debris.

As if leveling another Appalachian peak weren't enough cause for ire, Massey's dynamiting of Coal River Mountain will also close the door on an ambitious wind-energy proposal that could provide tens of thousands of the region's residents with clean, renewable energy; create hundreds of jobs; and provide the government of Raleigh County, where Coal River Mountain is located, with over a million dollars in annual tax revenues.

These two radically divergent trajectories — one of environmental destruction and dependency on highly polluting fossil fuels and the other moving toward greater clean-energy production — bring into sharp focus the intensifying political battles over national energy policy, climate change legislation currently before Congress and the high-profile summit in Copenhagen about reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.

“Massey Energy is literally destroying the very thing that could give West Virginians long-lasting jobs and renewable energy,” Judy Bonds, co-director of Coal River Mountain Watch and recipient of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2003, told *The Independent*. “They're destroying our future for their own short-term gain.”

A December 2008 study by the environmental consultancy group Downstream

Strategies concluded that the high ridges on Coal River Mountain offer an ideal location for an array of 164 wind turbines with a capacity of 328 megawatts of power. Massey's mountaintop removal, however, could shear more than 1,200 feet off the 3,500-foot peak, thereby marginalizing the location's wind-energy potential.

While the South's potential for wind-energy production is limited, several wind farms have been built or licensed in West Virginia in recent years. Turbines atop Coal River Mountain could more than double the state's wind power.

Downstream Strategies' study found that the project could also spawn a robust local renewable-energy sector and boost local tax revenues. Mountaintop removal on Coal River Mountain offers a peak of 866 jobs per year, according to the study. A wind array, the study authors estimate, would provide 28 percent more jobs. If the wind turbines are produced locally, the study's authors claim the facility would produce 314 percent more local jobs than mining. Additionally, the wind array could provide \$1.74 million in annual property taxes to the county government. Taxes on coal extraction, conversely, bring in a paltry \$36,000 a year nationwide.

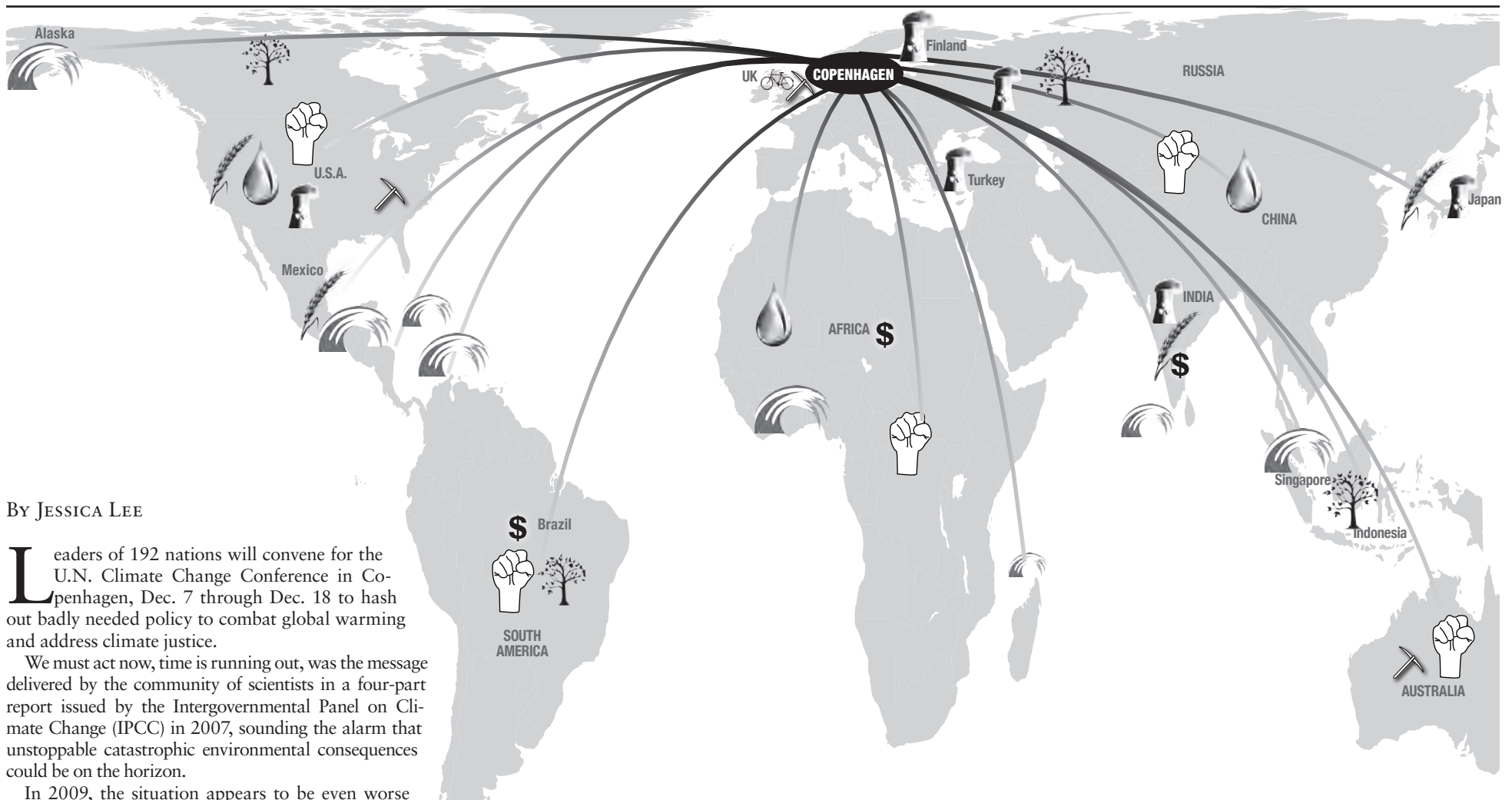
The company has been permitted to blast on two Coal Mountain sites, and with each day, the dynamiting of these areas is slowly reducing the wind-energy potential of the mountain. “We're losing eight wind turbines, about 16 megawatts of power, from the blast area,” Bonds said. “But we're not just losing a part of the wind project, we're losing mountain heritage — the streams, the ginseng, the carbon sink of the forest.” Bonds' roots in the Coal River Mountain region go back 10 generations. Her father and grandfather both worked in the coal industry.

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ROADBLOCK: Residents of the Coal River Valley in southern West Virginia gathered at the front gates of Marfork Coal Company Feb. 3 in protest of its expanding mountaintop removal mine operations on Coal River Mountain, a potential wind-energy facility site. PHOTO: © Antrim Caskey

Converging on Copenhagen



BY JESSICA LEE

Leaders of 192 nations will convene for the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Dec. 7 through Dec. 18 to hash out badly needed policy to combat global warming and address climate justice.

We must act now, time is running out, was the message delivered by the community of scientists in a four-part report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007, sounding the alarm that unstoppable catastrophic environmental consequences could be on the horizon.

In 2009, the situation appears to be even worse than what the IPCC forecast. Sea ice and glaciers are melting more rapidly than expected. The oceans are acidifying. Methane is leaking from melting arctic permafrost. This is bringing us closer to dangerous feedback loops. Destructive climatic events will intensify as the oceans warm, sea levels rise, currents change, weather patterns shift and large amounts of methane gas are released into the atmosphere. Humans will suffer from intensified storms, droughts, invasive species, the spread of disease, flooding and famine.

So, if things are so dire, why are the meetings at Copenhagen already deemed a failure?

The system that brought us this problem — industrial capitalism built upon conquest and colonization by rich Northern countries for the last 500 years — isn't going to provide answers. Well, that is, unless there is profit to be made.


This battle over money and power is holding up climate negotiations between the richer, developed countries and everyone else. The answer is simple: reduce pollution, now. One major obstacle, however, is that mainstream environmentalists want to move away from coal, oil, natural gas and biofuel mixtures, and protect the biodiversity of the oceans and forests, but without confronting the power structure responsible. It is also about equality and responsibility: Why should less developed countries have to carry the burden equally, when others have been spewing industrial pollution for some 250 years? Should the Global North pay climate reparations to the Global South?


Curbing climate change will require an unprecedented global honesty about the injustices and environmental devastation caused by greed and power.


That's why leaders of rich countries are dragging their feet. A handful of countries, including the United States, announced Nov. 15 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit that it would be impossible to negotiate a climate treaty in Copenhagen, given the complexity of the issue.


Ten years after a coalition of environmental and global justice movements took on the World Trade Organization in Seattle, a vast grassroots effort will come together in Copenhagen to disrupt business as usual. It's time to act now against the system that threatens the planet.


A SNAPSHOT OF WHO WILL BE IN THE STREETS:


 The burning of coal is the leading source of carbon dioxide the atmosphere. Worldwide, groups have been protesting the construction of new coal-fired power plants and the mining and shipments of coal. NASA's climate expert James Hansen says that countries need to completely move away from coal power.


 Because trees slow global warming by capturing carbon dioxide activists are working to slow the destruction of forests around the world.


 For indigenous peoples who largely depend on the local ecosystem for survival, the effects of climate change have a greater impact. Threats include invasive species, shifts in ecosystems and migrations, mass extinctions, coastal erosion, rising sea levels and a decrease in water supplies. These same communities also say they can offer solutions because they know how to live sustainably on the land.


 Small farmers are organized to fight for their right to land. The agriculture industry has pushed them out, and devastated diverse sustainable regional food systems. Small-scale agriculture allows carbon to be sequestered in soil and use less fuel and chemical inputs. Moreover, if we eat local, less energy is used to ship food around the planet.

 The intersection of climate change and neoliberalism means half of the developing world lacks access to clean water. Altering weather patterns will cause severe drought. Communities contend that water security should be included in the fight for climate justice.

 Operation Bike Bloc aims to use pedal power as a direct action strategy. The British climate-art activist collective The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination will promote cycling and civil disobedience. The Critical Mass bicycle ride has been organized in hundreds of cities around the world for more than a decade to advocate for bike-friendly culture.

 Organizations and many nations in the Global South are demanding that climate reparations be paid by the industrialized Global North. There is an ecological debt, they contend, from the adverse affects caused by the richest countries polluting for the last 250 years. There is also a call to cancel the debt developing countries owe to international financial institutions.

 As the coal and oil sectors are targeted as climate culprits, the nuclear power industry is remaking itself as a green alternative. Environmentalists counter that nuclear power has a huge carbon footprint because of the energy needed to mine and process uranium, construct and decommission the plants, and handle, process and store radioactive waste.

 Rising sea levels are threatening communities that did little to cause global warming. They are bringing their stories to Copenhagen to advocate for climate justice.

For news in Copenhagen, visit climate-justice-action.org, 350.org and indymedia.org

Climate Justice Action

Continued from page 12

The difference, according to Kahn Russell, is that climate justice groups are led by people affected by issues of class and race. Their work and perspectives have generally been overlooked in the West, perhaps at the peril of building a more cohesive climate movement.

“Even though the issue is beginning to get that kind of force behind it,” said Abigail Singer, an organizer with the Bay Area’s Rising Tide North America, “it needs to be framed more for regular people and folks who tend to be more marginalized.”

Instead, the number of Americans concerned by global warming is dropping. A recent Pew Research Center survey found that only 57 percent “believe there is strong scientific evidence the Earth has gotten hotter over the past few decades.”

A CONTINENT ON FIRE

There is one rich nation, however, that is being forced to accept this reality. Australia is in the midst of an epic drought that could cause its fifth largest city, Adelaide, to run out of drinking water next year. It has also suffered dust storms, fires, cyclones and bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef — all of which scientists have linked to global warming.

Australia has become a hotbed of climate activism, mainly against the coal industry, which is responsible for nearly 50 percent of Australia’s energy and has made it the world’s leading exporter. According to Sourcewatch.org, which tracks nonviolent direct actions against the coal industry, Australians have waged at least a dozen actions in the last year alone, far outpacing the U.K.

Greenpeace has been at the forefront, temporarily shutting down Hazelwood Power Station, one of the world’s worst polluting coal plants, several times. Last month Australia’s first Climate Camp drew 500 people to the country’s oldest coal mine in an effort to block expansion.

THE U.S. AWAKENS

Such mass direct action has only recently surfaced in the United States, where climate activists have relied more on awareness campaigns and symbolic actions. Last March 2 in Washington, D.C., 2,500 people blocked the entrances to the Capitol Power Plant for more than four hours in what organizers called “the largest mass civil disobedience for the climate in U.S. history.”

Many viewed the action as a success because congressional leaders announced that the plant would switch from coal to natural gas, a marginally cleaner fuel. But other activists blamed the organizers for accepting a weak compromise and not taking stronger action while they had the numbers.

“Our intention was to reach out and engage people who did not consider themselves activists and create a positive experience,” said organizer Kahn Russell. “But maybe we shouldn’t have done as much hand-holding.”

Three weeks after the Capital Climate Action, some 200 Kansas residents rallied outside the statehouse in Topeka to protest two proposed new coal plants in the western part of the state. In April, 44 were arrested protesting Duke Energy’s plans to add coal-burning capabilities to its Cliffside plant in Charlotte, N.C.

A number of small groups in Appalachia are seeking to abolish mountaintop removal coal mining — a highly destructive practice that levels mountains and poisons the air, land and drinking water.

“It’s not about protesting the use of coal or about ending the use of coal,” said Mike Roselle, a longtime environmental activist, who helped found radical environmental

groups like Earth First! and the Ruckus society and now heads Climate Ground Zero (CGZ). “Coal is really just a symbol of what we have to do with all the fossil fuels, and if we can’t win on mountaintop removal, then there’s very little hope that anything can be done.”

CGZ members say a bottom-up approach can effectively build public support.

“We’re very cognizant of the fact that we’re a part of the broader climate movement,” said Mathew Louis-Rosenberg, an organizer with CGZ. “We believe this issue is the most powerful tool to use against coal.



PLANET OVER PROFITS: Four thousand people protested the U.N. Climate Talks in Bangkok, Thailand, in October. PHOTO: 350.ORG

It’s not an invisible gas and a bunch of science that people don’t really understand. ... People can look at a mountaintop removal site and go, ‘Oh my God, that’s terrible.’”

Since February, CGZ, has led 16 nonviolent direct actions — with a small number of locals and former underground miners — in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia, resulting in 116 arrests. According to Sourcewatch.org, nearly a third of all nonviolent direct actions against coal have been waged by mountaintop removal activists.

One of the most dramatic involved the

the world will have to completely decarbonize by 2050. To reach 350, we need to produce net negative emissions, which will require large-scale sequestration technologies that go far beyond reforestation.

Almost everyone, including scientists and activists, agrees that effecting such a transformation requires a global treaty with binding commitments to reduce emissions and policies that make renewable technology affordable and prioritize restructuring cities, transportation and agriculture. This is why sights are set on the climate treaty

now being developed by the United Nations.

Unfortunately, there are two major obstacles. The United States and European Union are looking to enact what critics call “false solutions,” essentially techno-fixes (such as biofuels) and market mechanisms (like cap and trade) that maintain the status quo.

Second, although the treaty was supposed to be ready by December at a conference in Copenhagen, world leaders, including President Barack Obama, have decided to delay legally binding elements to a second summit next year in Mexico City.

‘It feels as though the progressive tectonic plates are shifting, creating a movement that builds on the strengths of an earlier era but also learns from its mistakes.’

arrest of 29 people in late June, including NASA’s top climatologist Dr. James Hansen, the first scientist to warn Congress of the dangers of climate change 20 years ago.

Hansen has come to the aid of activists standing trial, like the ones in Britain who won their case, and has endorsed perhaps the most far-reaching climate campaign yet, known as 350.org.

Started in 2007 by Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, the first book on global warming for a general audience, 350.org attempts to bring the research of Hansen and his colleagues to the mainstream. Using thousands of years of reconstructed climate data and computer simulations, these scientists determined that the safe upper limit of carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere is 350 parts per million (ppm). Right now it’s at 383 ppm, about 100 ppm greater than before the Industrial Revolution.

In order to get to 350 ppm by 2100,

ing politically aware. They want, as McKibben put it, “new forms of organizing that don’t look like what’s come before.” 350.org is the perfect example, he said, in that it’s “people around the world rallying around a scientific data point, with music and art and faith and passion. Who’d a thunk it?”

FLASH-IN-THE-PAN MOB

Roselle, on the other hand, doesn’t find this fun, all-inclusive protest style all that encouraging. He says that it is unlikely that tactics like flash mobs, where people use social media to assemble a large group for a seemingly spontaneous visual stunt, can pose a real challenge to corporate executives and politicians.

“These types of actions don’t have the element of sacrifice or risk that a powerful action might have,” Roselle said. “Dressing up like a zombie and standing in front of a bank on Halloween isn’t going to work when you’re dealing with a violent and powerful regime.”

While there appears to be a split between direct action-oriented groups and movement-building organizations like 350.org, some people are attempting to meld traditional tactics with the new creative approach. University of Utah economics student Tim DeChristopher last year walked into a federal auction of oil and gas leases and posed as a bidder. He outbid speculators for thousands of acres of land worth \$1.7 million.

Fueled by frustration with what he called the climate movement’s “path of incrementalism,” DeChristopher was influenced by a group known as the Yes Men, two men who frequently pose as corporate executives at conferences or on major media outlets and either admit wrongdoing or satirize the company’s destructive ideology in an absurd way.

“Everybody’s talking about climate change,” said Andy Bichlbaum of the Yes Men, “but what we really need to change is the lack of people taking to the streets.”

Along with several other leading organizers, the Yes Men launched a website called BeyondTalk.net, which is attempting to gather 10,000 people willing “to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience.” The primary day of action being organized by a mixture of climate groups, from RAN and Rising Tide to 350.org, has been set for Nov. 30, the 10th anniversary of the nonviolent protests that shut down the World Trade Organization in Seattle.

A GLOBAL MOMENT

As Naomi Klein recently noted in *The Nation*, “There is certainly a Seattle quality to the Copenhagen mobilization: the huge range of groups that will be there; the diverse tactics that will be on display; and the developing-country governments ready to bring activist demands into the summit. But Copenhagen is not merely a Seattle do-over. It feels, instead, as though the progressive tectonic plates are shifting, creating a movement that builds on the strengths of an earlier era but also learns from its mistakes.”

Klein says, unlike Seattle, which “had a laundry list of grievances and few concrete alternatives,” Copenhagen “is about a single issue — climate change — but it weaves a coherent narrative about its cause, and its cures, that incorporates virtually every issue on the planet.”

In that context, the varied approach to climate activism in the United States and around the world doesn’t seem like the liability activists often make it out to be.

“The climate movement is like a board of chess,” Kahn Russell said. “Different groups are better suited to taking on different opponents.”

Bryan Farrell writes regularly for the blog, wagingnonviolence.org.

Colombia Set to Be Pentagon's Covert Hub

BY EVA GOLINGER

An official document submitted to Congress by the U.S. Air Force earlier this year reveals that it is seeking to upgrade a military airfield in Palanquero, Colombia, that will provide the Pentagon with "...an opportunity for conducting full-spectrum operations throughout South America..."

The Air Force document, entitled "Military Construction Program Fiscal Year 2010," details a \$46 million construction project to enhance "strategic airlift aircraft and refueling capabilities" at Colombia's primary military air base at Palanquero, located some 60 miles northwest of the capital, Bogotá. The document, submitted in May, outlines how the Air Force will spend the \$46 million, since approved by Congress, to improve the airfield, associated ramps and other installations and build a 200,000-gallon fuel storage tank on the base.

The plan is to enable the Pentagon to engage in "operations in a critical sub-region of our hemisphere where security and stability is under constant threat from narcotics-funded terrorist insurgencies, anti-U.S. governments, endemic poverty and recurring natural disasters."

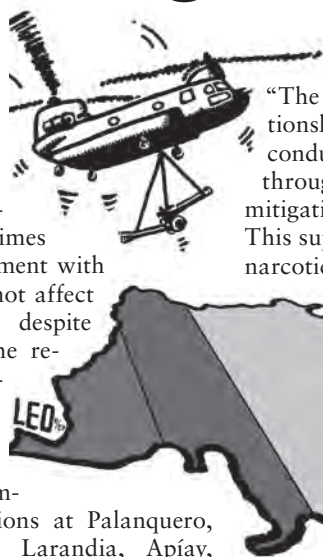
This information contradicts explanations offered by Colombian President Álvaro Uribe and the U.S. State Department regarding the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) signed by the two nations Oct. 30. Both governments have stated that the military agreement refers only to coun-

ternarcotics and counterterrorism operations within Colombian territory. President Uribe has reiterated numerous times that the military agreement with the United States will not affect Colombia's neighbors, despite constant concern in the region regarding U.S. intentions.

The DCA gives the Pentagon access to and use of seven Colombian military installations at Palanquero, Malambo, Tolemaida, Larandia, Apiay, Cartagena and Málaga. Additionally, the agreement allows for "the access and use of all other installations and locations as necessary" throughout Colombia, with no restrictions. Together with the complete immunity the DCA provides to U.S. military and civilian personnel, including private security contractors, the agreement effectively makes Colombia a U.S. client-state.

To classify a country as "anti-U.S." is to consider it a state enemy. Given the steady stream of aggressive statements from the State and Defense departments and the Congress against Venezuela, Bolivia and even Ecuador, these are the nations Washington considers a "constant threat." In this context, the U.S. government's agreement with Colombia is based on the notion that the region is full of "enemies".

According to the Air Force document,



"The strong security cooperation relationship also offers an opportunity for conducting full spectrum operations throughout South America to include mitigating the Counternarcotics capability." This supports analysts' claims that counter-narcotics operations are secondary to other

U.S. military operations. This is

stated more explicitly

in another U.S. Air

Force docu-

ment, the

"Global En

Route Strategy,"

delivered in April at a

"symposium at Max-

well Air Force Base in

Alabama," according

to the Associated Press.

The "Global En Route Strategy" refers to C-17 aircraft, one of two cargo planes that "form the core of the [Defense Department's] strategic airlift capability." The Air Force notes that from Palanquero "a C-17 could cover the entire continent, with the exception of the Cape Horn region" if adequate fuel supplies are available. It adds that the counter-narcotics mission in South America "has not required the use of strategic airlift in its prosecution," indicating the base could be used for aggressive military operations.

The *Associated Press* report noted this, too: "Beyond counternarcotics, the document says, Palanquero could become ... a potential jumping-off point for operations by expeditionary forces."

The Air Force's Military Construction Program also confirms that operations at Palanquero will enhance Pentagon espionage and intelligence operations, and allow for increased warfare capabilities. "A presence will also increase our capability to conduct Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, improve global reach, support logistics requirements, improve partnerships, improve theater security cooperation and expand expeditionary warfare capability."

These revelations come at a time of tension between Colombia and Venezuela. Recently, the Venezuelan government claimed to have captured three spies from the Colombian intelligence agency, DAS, and discovered several active destabilization and espionage operations against Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. The operations — Fénix, Salomón and Falcón, respectively — were revealed in documents found with the captured DAS agents.

The information in the Pentagon documents reveals that Washington seeks to use Colombia as a launching pad for regional warfare. Before this declaration of war, the peoples of Latin America must stand strong. Latin American integration is the best defense against Empire's aggression.

Eva Gollinger is the author of the best-selling books, The Chávez Code: Cracking U.S. Intervention in Venezuela (2006) and Bush vs. Chávez: Washington's War on Venezuela (2007). Arun Gupta contributed to this report.

ILLUSTRATION: LEO GARCIA

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BRECHT FORUM

TUES, DEC 1 • 7:30pm

DISCUSSION: PSYCHOLOGY & ECONOMY. Harriet Fraad and Richard Wolff will discuss how the continued economic deterioration (credit crisis, rising food and energy prices, falling home prices, looming recession) is interacting with the psychological stresses and strains of U.S. life today (isolation, loneliness, anxiety, depression, violence, child neglect).

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

WED, DEC 2 • 7:30pm

DISCUSSION: GAZA: ONE YEAR LATER. Norman G. Finkelstein will provide an overview of Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip for 22 days starting Dec. 27 and discuss the situation today.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THURS, DEC 3 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY: LEFT OF MARX. Author Carole Boyce Davies reads from her new book, *In Left of Karl Marx*, which assesses the activism, writing, and legacy of Claudia Jones (1915–1964)—a pioneering Afro-Caribbean

radical intellectual, dedicated communist and feminist.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

FRI, DEC 4 • 7:30pm

DISCUSSION: RIGHT-WING POPULISM & WHITE RAGE. From the murder of Dr. George Tiller, to the disruptions at healthcare town hall meetings, to the racist attacks on cable TV news shows, it is clear that right-wing populism is on the rise. Political Research Associates Senior Analyst Chip Berlet brings 25 years of research into the discussion.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

TUES, DEC 8 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY: 500 YEARS OF PROTESTS. Celebrate the release of *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, a eight-volume work presenting the history of protest and revolution over the past 500 years.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THURS, DEC 17 • 7:30pm

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author of

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in conversation with

Eric Foner & Bruce Robbins



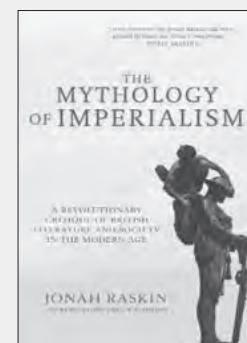
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The Ideology of Hope

When food prices skyrocketed last year, sparking riots in dozens of countries, Raj Patel's prophetic *Stuffed and Starved* became the book to read to understand how a global food system was constructed for the benefit of a relatively few corporations and to the detriment of billions consigned to either hunger or obesity.

Patel's latest work is *The Value of Nothing*, in which he deftly critiques the ideology and functioning of the "free market," while posing already existing alternatives to capitalism gone wild. *The Independent's* Arun Gupta sat down with the writer, activist and academic to talk about selfishness, democracy, rights and why a hamburger should really cost \$200.

ARUN GUPTA: What message are you trying to convey in *The Value of Nothing*?

RAJ PATEL: I'm trying to explain the economic crisis and provide a crash course about why prices and value are not the same thing. The diagnosis is a political one. The first half of the book deals with the recession and the crisis of capitalism. The second half is about hope — and not the vapid type that was peddled last year — but something far more concrete and practical. Moving beyond the idea that all we need to set things straight is an enlightened consumerism and a bit of government regulation, the book examines what social movements are doing to effect systemic change.

AG: Reporting about the economy usually consists of data about production, consumption, income, growth, jobs. Why do you place so much emphasis on ideology and behavior?

RP: Speaking about the economy as a series of indicators is already an ideological decision, a choice to obscure some irreducibly political elements from the picture. The economy is people's lived experience of work, after all. For example, when we just hear the unemployment data, the battles over jobs and workers' control of the workplace are hidden. By talking about ideology and behavior I try to go beneath what the mainstream media report and provide tools to interrogate the standard reporting. The story has everything to do with the way modern consumer society transforms us into far more rapacious creatures than we would otherwise be.

AG: What is the popular notion of the free market?

RP: There's the economic utopia of the perfect market, where there are many suppliers and many buyers, perfect information, no transaction costs or barriers to entry. The notion of the "free market" was peddled very explicitly throughout the Cold War as providing freedom above all else. Yet the market provides freedom in an incredibly restricted sense. You are as free as the property you own. Without

money, you're without liberty. Because we decide to distribute society's goods through the free market, the poor are unsubstantially free.

AG: You argue the market is "constructed." Explain.

RP: People think that the markets that are taught in economics 101 are somehow timeless. They're not — they're pretty new. The idea that we can sell our labor or land is historically aberrant. It's only about 500 years old. It was constructed through the act of enclosure, which, in turn, inaugurated what we now know as capitalism. These markets didn't happen by magic — they required a strong and forceful government to make them. And, we're discovering, they require a strong and forceful government to resuscitate them once they've collapsed.

AG: Are you arguing in favor of essentialism?

RP: We've been fed the line that we are selfish animals at heart. It is an idea taught early and often, and results in Ayn Rand being widely read and respected from U.S. high schools to corporate boardrooms. But we're not purely selfish animals, and almost every civilization has known this. The Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, was interested in primate studies, using

them to make arguments about how we are socialized and our natural inclination to cooperate. Our state of nature isn't, he observed, red in tooth and claw. We're much more complex than "homo economicus," the standard creature of economics, a being of perpetual want and greed. Studies show that we're not essentially any one thing, but that we're capable of behaving entirely contrary to a self-interested animal.

AG: You contend that the actual price of a \$4 Big Mac should be \$200. What are the real costs of that hamburger?

RP: The Center for Science and Environment in India tried a few years ago to figure out the true cost of a hamburger. Assuming that it was



BEYOND THE INDICATORS: Author and academic Raj Patel says democracy is everywhere, but only if we stop viewing our lives as spectators.

raised on pasture that was once rainforest, the ecological services provided by that rainforest, the loss of diversity, carbon sequestration, water cycling, fuel and tropical product sources, among many other things, the cost would come to \$200. The U.S. food industry has huge hidden costs, from the agricultural run-off that causes a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico to the cultural destruction wrought by the "Western" diet. There are also huge health costs associated with poor diet — in 2007, \$174 billion was spent in the U.S. caring for people with diabetes — as well as the public funds that support the industrial food system.

Cheap food is "cheat food." There are all kinds of costs that are externalized from the price we pay at the checkout. We pay those costs one way or another — but the food companies don't. Merely having a system of free markets with accurate prices still doesn't address the underlying issues of poverty and disenfranchisement.

AG: How would you describe the system under which we live?

RP: I once called it "incipient global fascism." It's a system in which both the corporations and the state push a vision of citizenship, nationalism, patriotism, inclusion and distribution and in which transgression is punished. It is about a particular moment of conjuncture between the state and capital. Although there are instances of private contractors doing policing, such as after Hurricane Katrina, policing is still done by the government. It's a state and corporate conjuncture.

During the recent G-20 protests, Pittsburgh was turned into a police state in the service of capital. The underlying politics of fear that we've had since 9/11 is alive and well in the Obama administration, and is alive everywhere else in the world, too.

AG: You talk a lot about democracy, participation and collective decision-making as a solution, but isn't that confusing the mechanics of politics with ideology? Doesn't that first require a public that is educated to be skeptical, thoughtful and rational?

RP: We have lost the ability to function as "small d" democrats. Where do we learn the art of moderation, of reasonableness, of having principles, of learning to negotiate?

There is an embarrassment of places where we can start learning about democracy and equally many places where democracy is on the defensive. Rank-and-file-driven initiatives like the National Union of Healthcare Workers, the United Electrical Workers, the Longshore Workers and the Wobblies are fighting back. Schools, prisons and even radio stations are spaces in which people can learn democracy. Everywhere can be a school for democracy, but only if we stop viewing our lives as spectators.

AG: You speak of rights, but hasn't the idea of rights been co-opted by neoliberalism?

RP: Rights were also co-opted from the get-go, and yet they have always escaped the box the powerful tried to put them in. Although rights were invented to mollify the people who didn't have them, in practice they are the language that has been used by everyone from the landless-workers movement in Brazil to the Zapatistas to the shack-dwellers in South Africa as an authority that trumps the state. As we make our mistakes towards a more perfect union, rights can be a safety net as we engage in that difficult process.

The Value of Nothing will be released by Picador in January.

Winds of Change in Appalachia

Continued from page 12

A wind project also poses far fewer environmental hazards than mining, which generates mountains of rubble and lakes of toxic sludge. Traditional mining removes coal from a mountain as miners bore deep into the earth to extract coal from underground seams. Mountaintop removal could be described, however, as removing the mountain from the coal. Companies blast the mountain away by using a mix of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. The runoff from these blasts, which often leaches into nearby drinking water, contains an array of toxic metals — such as selenium — that can cause kidney and liver damage as well as nervous-system disorders.

Standing in the way of development of the wind farm are various legal, economic and political hurdles. But proponents of the wind-farm proposal argue that the project should be fully investigated before it's too late.

"In essence, this is our Waterloo. America really needs to consider which direction we are going in terms of energy production," Bonds says.

Coal is big business in West Virginia, where there are 33 billion tons of estimated coal reserves. Last year, 158 million tons of coal was produced in the state and much of the revenue generated from that production flows up the corporate ladder. Massey is a \$3 billion corporation and a political powerhouse in the state. It is West Virginia's largest employer and CEO Don Blankenship, whose total compensation for 2008 topped \$11 million, doles out hefty checks to local, state and national political figures.

Half of U.S. electricity comes from coal-fired power plants. Each time Americans flip on a light switch, turn on a radio or power up a laptop, they are tapping into a vast, largely coal-powered energy infrastructure. On average, Americans each consume 20 pounds of coal per day. That the United States has the world's largest coal reserves means that dislodging coal from future energy production will be a sustained struggle.

Back on Coal River Mountain, Massey's blasting is occurring just 200 feet from a coal slurry filled with millions of gallons of toxic sludge. This situation evokes memories of the December 2008 coal slurry disaster in Tennessee, when an im-

poundment burst at the Kingston Power Plant. Twelve homes were buried and 300 acres flooded by 1.1 billion gallons of toxic coal sludge. In 1972, 125 people were killed in Buffalo Creek, W. Va., when an impoundment burst, unleashing a 20-foot-high wave of coal sludge.

Massey has its own history of coal slurry disasters. In 2000, an impoundment owned by the Martin County Coal Company, a Massey subsidiary, failed near Inez, Ky., releasing 250 million gallons of sludge. Today, Massey manages one of West Virginia's largest slurries, the 2.8-billion-gallon Shumate impoundment, which is carved out of a mountainside perched above the Marsh Fork Elementary School.

Massey's dynamiting of Coal River Mountain has attracted international media attention, which may bring increased scrutiny of the company and the practice of mountaintop removal mining. Yet, with each day, the likelihood that Coal River Mountain might represent a turning point in U.S. energy production becomes more and more a dream reduced to dust.

Robert S. Eshelman has written for Abu Dhabi's *The National*, *In These Times*, *The Nation* and *tomdispatch.com*.

Stuy-Town Gets a Break

Continued from page 3

to deregulate rents in buildings receiving J-51 benefits. Thus, they invested billions of dollars, believing they'd be able to make a profit from dramatically higher rents. They should not be penalized for relying on that doctrine, they now say. Miller has little patience with that argument. The city's J-51 ordinance and the regulations of its Department of Housing Preservation and Development, he wrote, "said, in plain English, that every apartment in an assisted building must remain rent-regulated the whole time the building gets tax benefits."

The state Division of Housing and Community Renewal, he contends, illegally misinterpreted the law under the distinctly pro-landlord administration of Governor George Pataki, and "under Bloomberg, HPD refused to enforce it." Instead, HPD cut deals where it let landlords take buildings out of the Mitchell-Lama middle-income housing program, with the poorest tenants protected by costly federal subsidies. Some owners were allowed to return J-51 benefits retroactively.

Stella D'oro Shutdown

Continued from page 3

While prospects for a cookie co-op in the Bronx have stalled, the factory is being gutted. Filippou said Stella D'oro would be finished shipping equipment to Ohio by the end of November. He predicted that giant 10-by-100-foot ovens, which can't be hauled away in an 18-wheeler, will be sold for scrap.

Filippou said that Local 50 is fighting to make sure the Stella D'oro workers receive full payment of an estimated \$15 million they are owed, including \$1.5 million in severance pay, another \$1.5 million in back pay from the strike and \$12 million in pension and health-care fund liabilities.

The Stella D'oro strike ended in July after a union victory at the National Labor Relations Board forced the company to take back the strikers under the terms of their old contract,

"HPD could have given better protection, affecting more tenants, without spending a dime on subsidies, if it simply enforced the J-51 law as written and forced the landlord to treat the tenants as rent-stabilized when the developments were privatized," Miller avers.

The decision leaves several questions open. How much will tenants be reimbursed for rent overcharges, and how can they collect that money? What will be the new rents for tenants whose apartments were illegally deregulated? How will the decision be applied to other buildings that decontrolled rents while taking J-51 benefits? These questions will likely be in the courts for years.

The case is not the first time Stuyvesant Town has figured in legal history. Built by the Met Life insurance company after World War II, the complex was initially restricted to whites only. When tenants organized and moved a black family into a vacant apartment, Met Life tried to evict more than 40 of the protesters. It failed, and in 1951, the city enacted a law banning racial discrimination in publicly assisted housing.

along with back pay.

Filippou said nine former Stella D'oro workers have started new jobs at bakeries in Queens, Long Island and New Jersey that are organized by Local 50. He expects 20 to 30 percent of the workers to eventually land unionized bakery positions in the New York City area.

But while the workers may not have won this fight, neither did Brynwood. According to Local 50 lawyer Louis Nikolaidis, Brynwood bought Stella D'oro for \$17 million in 2006 and hoped to flip it for three times as much after busting the union. Instead, he estimates the private equity firm will lose \$10 million to \$20 million on the deal.

"They weren't brilliant thinkers," Nikolaidis concluded. "They didn't add any value."

This article is adapted from an earlier version that appeared in Clarion, the newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress (psc-cuny.org).

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THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE

Reflections on the Future of The Global Justice Movement



HEATHER GAUTNEY • BROOKE LEHMAN • EDDIE YUEN • KAZEMBE BALAGUN • MIKE MENSER

Organizers, researchers and activists discuss the Battle of Seattle and the spectacular ups and downs of the Global Justice Movement — along with its tactics, concepts and strategies, and its complicated, potent and dispersed present and future.

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Stepping Out

Precious

DIRECTED BY LEE DANIELS
LIONSGATE, 2009

Claireece “Precious” Jones (Gabourey Sidibe) is the shining star of her own imagination. Surrounded by bright lights and flashing cameras, she’s a magazine cover model with dreams of being in music videos and having a light-skinned love interest. Then reality intrudes — Precious is obese, illiterate, unloved and unwanted. Pregnant with her father’s second child, she silently endures unbridled physical and sexual abuse at home and the ridicule of her peers at school and around Harlem. Her mother, Mary (played to cruel perfection by Mo’Nique), spends her days watching TV and destroying her daughter’s self-esteem.

The film’s dynamite performances—including Mariah Carey as a social worker and Lenny Kravitz as a male nurse — and unabashedly raw storytelling save *Precious*, directed by Lee Daniels, from becoming just another film championing the underdog.

When 16-year-old Precious is facing expulsion from school, a concerned teacher encourages her to enroll in an alternative high school. It is in Ms. Rain’s (played by Paula Patton) English class that Precious finds a group of tough-

yet-supportive peers and a teacher who breaks through to her.

Using an almost all-female, African-American cast, Daniels’ decision to vilify Mary makes the film fall short. By transforming her into a monster, he fails to account for systemic issues of social and racial inequality — thus making the film’s larger message of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” more believable.

While the demonization of characters like Mary is disheartening in the white mainstream media, it is even more difficult to stomach in a Black film.

Besides a title card in the beginning of the film and some outdated hairstyles, there are few indications that the film takes place in the Harlem of 1987 — in the midst of the Reagan administration’s War on Drugs and Mayor Ed Koch’s welfare cuts.

By ignoring these political realities and the role they played in creating a permanent Black underclass, Daniels disregards a crucial aspect of his characters’ lives.

The image of the “welfare queen” is a social stereotype that an astounding number of Americans still buy into. The problem with Mary’s character is that she commits horrendous acts for no reason whatsoever. Even when Mary pleads with Precious’ social worker for custody of her grandchildren and her daughter



in the film’s climax, Mary is reduced to a woman chasing a government check.

However, it’s important to remember that *Precious* is about one family and their journey through Harlem, and as a singular story, the film delivers. More than just a typical Tyler Perry tome preaching the virtues of Christianity through layers of clichéd storylines, Daniels succeeds in making *Precious* realistic without compromising the story’s grit.

By the end of the movie, Precious

goes through a rebirth of sorts, one that takes her from the cruel existence of the solitary life she leads in her mother’s house to a world of independence and self-worth.

There has already been considerable Oscar buzz surrounding both Mo’Nique’s and Sidibe’s performances, and the film received the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and the People’s Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Daniels is no stranger to tackling tough subjects, with past

credits including *Monster’s Ball*, *The Woodsman* and *Shadow Boxer*. The film may be problematic in a social context, but the performances are disarming, dynamic and original enough for the viewer to become engaged in the story for almost long enough to overlook these flaws.

—JUELL STEWART

This review was adapted from an article that originally appeared in ColorLines.

Growing Up as History

The Lesser Seductions of History

BY AUGUST SCHULENBERG
FLUX THEATRE ENSEMBLE

AT THE CHERRY PIT, 155 BANK STREET
MANHATTAN, UNTIL NOV. 22

“This is a play about belonging to something ... what it gives you, what it takes away,” says History. It’s her lesser — and greater — seductions that are the subject of August Schulenberg’s beautiful and compelling new play.

It begins in 1960, as 10 young people go about their business across the United States, unaware that the moment in time called the sixties is about to change everything. They’re white and Black, male and female, middle- and working-class: Isaac, the poet (Jake Alexander), and Marie (Tiffany Clement), his wife, supporting him as a waitress; Isaac’s cousin Lee (Isaiah Tanenbaum), a painter; George (Michael Davis), a jazz musician, and his sister Martha (Raushanah Simmons), an office worker; Barry (Matthew Archambault), a baseball player, and his brother Bobby (Jason Paradine), a medical student; Tegan (Kelly

O’Donnell), an activist-journalist; and Lizzie (Christina Schipp), a writer, and her sister Anisa (Ingrid Nordstrom), a scientist. Most appear to be heterosexual, although that will change for some. Most are more interested in their personal lives than in the fate of the world, although that, too, will change.

A chorus figure who may be the Goddess of History (Candice Holder) leads them through each year of the Sixties as they come to envision saving the world in different ways. Some rise to heights of heroism; some commit acts of brutality. One is raped and turns to violent resistance; one rapes and spends a decade expiating his crime. Collectively, their lives reveal the price of commitment to “something bigger than yourself.” *The Lesser Seductions of History* asks, is the commitment worth the price? Maybe, it answers.

The play isn’t perfect. Ten leading characters are a lot to keep track of and hard to portray in depth; some are convincing and vivid; others remain types rather than individuals. Their diversity is to some extent pro forma; they constitute a fairly broad cross-section of the white, educated U.S. middle

class (if slightly tilted toward the arts), but George and Martha, the two Black characters, stand for all African-Americans, and Barry and Bobby, the working-class brothers, represent their entire class (although it’s Barry, the athlete-GI, who comes most vividly to life, thanks to Archambault’s powerful performance. Schulenberg does get a lot of the 1960s right, especially

the casual brutality with which so many male idealists treated women before Second Wave Feminism raised our collective consciousness. (“Far away stars die/Because they don’t have Marie/To clean up their mess,” declares one of Isaac’s haikus.)

But the heartbreak and the losses the characters suffer — those are real. When the most loving

character is driven to a terrible, violent act by conflicting passions; when another realizes that a terminal illness will keep her from seeing the fulfillment of her life’s dream; when still another has to choose between success in his work and the taboo love of his life — Schulenberg’s soaring language brings those crises and griefs home like hammer blows.

That gift for language carries the play and forces us to confront its existential question. “If love was all you did,” says History, “the human race would still be snuggling in caves wrapped in rat-fur, enraptured at the wonder of fire.” But, says Tegan, “When I come back from ... the work of moral justice that used to call like a clear bell in my heart, all I feel is alone. And I think ... maybe it’s possible to miss your own life.”

No, *The Lesser Seductions of History* isn’t perfect. It’s just beautiful, and, possibly, great. Keep an eye out for the name August Schulenberg. My best guess is that you’ll be hearing it again.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK



The Goodwill of Wal-Mart Women

To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise
By BETHANY MORETON
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009

While the story of Wal-Mart's global domination — complete with big-box stores, the destruction of local businesses and anti-union sentiments — is fairly well known, the way in which this retail giant overcame local fears of big business and corporatism in the heart of the Ozarks, is not.

In *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, Beth Moreton, a history professor at the University of Georgia, examines how Wal-Mart, with its headquarters in Bentonville, Ark., “arose in the fiery heartland of anti-monopolism.” In the late 19th century anti-corporate sentiment ran high among rural Ozark settlers, or as Moreton termed them, “the mythic original citizen, the yeoman.” They called for the government to repatriate Indian lands to whites, keep “foreign monopolies” at bay and build railroads to allow for economic activity. These sentiments continued well into the 1930s, when Depression-era farmers pressured the federal government to regulate business and provide economic protection for the little guy. The farmers may have distrusted corporations, but they imitated their structures in order to get a piece of capitalism's riches by embracing modern business techniques to market their goods and banding together to form cooperatives.

These conflicting currents within economic populism had to be settled for Sam Walton to build his retail empire from its Ozark base.

Walton, who opened his flagship store in 1962 in Rogers, Ark., sought to channel the farmer cooperative sensibility into his stores by hiring Ozark men — many plucked off the farm or only a generation removed from agrarian life — for middle-management positions. But the most important, and illuminating, point in *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* is how Walton tapped into the pool of cheap white female Ozark labor and appealed to their Christian values to create what the author calls “servant leaders.”

Walton knew his region and its people. Women's housework consisted of shopping and house keeping, and was unpaid and generally undervalued by the region's dominant white Christian society. The trick for Wal-Mart was to get these white women to view their service-sector jobs as part of Christian service — helping other Christian women (who often were their neighbors) provide for their families through purchasing

wrote that unions were wasting their time with the female service workers and should be focusing on managers instead.

Moreton peppers her book with articles culled from decades' worth of Wal-Mart newsletters, which feature pieces written by female employees extolling the importance of Christian values in the workplace. The Christian values of service workers and consumers alike have also influenced the type of products the mega-chain sells, as it has become the largest seller of Christian books and other items. The book's chapters on Wal-Mart's role in creating neoliberal economic and Christian centric colleges to supply middle managers are less interesting, though notable.

But as free-trade policies took hold in the 1990s, Wal-Mart outgrew the Ozarks and rapidly expanded throughout the globe, making inroads in Canada and Mexico.

Walton's “servant leader” philosophy has been challenged during Wal-Mart's push for world retail domination. The chain's short-lived 1985 “Made in America” campaign ran into the brick wall of cheaply made Chinese goods when *Dateline NBC* aired an exposé of the company's sourcing practices in 1992. By 2001, more than 1.6 million current and former female Wal-Mart employees, subject to the good ol' boy network, brought what is now the largest class-action suit — *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.* — against the retail giant, based on years of workplace and wage discrimination. Wal-Mart's corporate strategy relies on low-wage women workers rightfully valuing their work, but how long can it continue to pay them so little?

—BENNETT BAUMER



GUERRUNTZ

household items. While Walton was a mainline Protestant and not an evangelical, he appreciated how Christianity could be used as social control over his largely female employees. Women workers would see their Wal-Mart jobs as an extension of their Christian faith and thus be more willing to accept male managerial power and low wages because their work entailed other rewards.

In exchange for white male privilege, Wal-Mart's well-paid managers worked brutal hours under harsh scrutiny. In a 1993 anonymous memo signed by middle managers, sent to the top brass and forwarded to a union, they



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READING: JANE AUSTIN & SEA MONSTERS. Celebrate *New York Times* bestseller *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, featuring the book's co-authors, Jane Austen and Ben H. Winters. Ms. Austen will be making her first in-store appearance since her death in 1817.

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DISCUSSION: POLITICAL ART & OAXACA. Award-winning graphic novelist and illustrator Peter Kuper discusses political art and its application through history.

WED DEC 9 • \$5 SUGG

BOOK PARTY: BAY AREA PUNK. Release party for *Gimme Something Better*, which chronicles more than two decades of Bay Area punk. Join co-author Silke Tudor in a conversation about social consciousness, creative uprising, and destructive decadence, with folks who were there.

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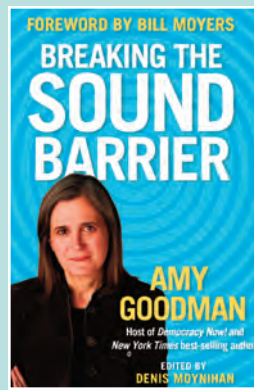
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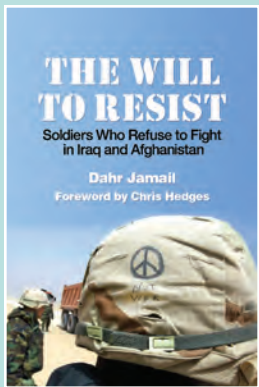


Breaking the Sound Barrier

Amy Goodman, edited by Denis Moynihan • \$16

Amy Goodman, award-winning host of the daily, internationally broadcast radio and television program *Democracy Now!*, breaks through the corporate media's lies, sound-bites, and silence in this wide-ranging new collection of articles, based on her columns for King Features Syndicate.

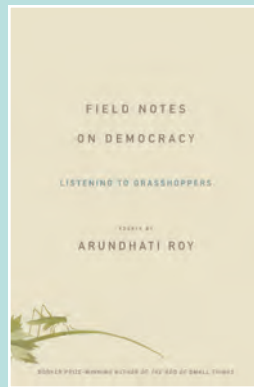
In place of the usual suspects—the “experts” who, in Goodman's words, “know so little about so much, explain the world to us, and get it so wrong”—this accessible, lively collection allows the voices the corporate media exclude and ignore to be heard loud and clear.



The Will to Resist
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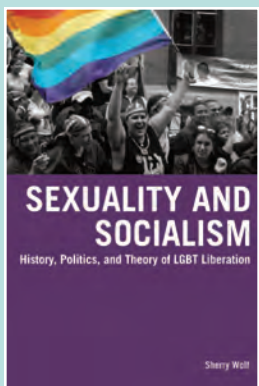


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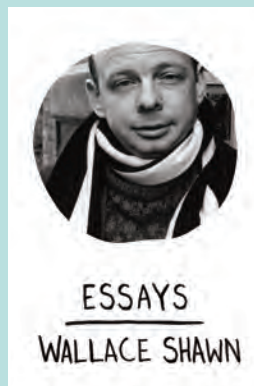
Combining fierce conviction, deft political analysis, and beautiful writing, this is the essential new book from Arundhati Roy. This series of essays examines the dark side of democracy in contemporary India. It looks closely at how religious majoritarianism, cultural nationalism, and neo-fascism simmer just under the surface of a country that projects itself as the world's largest democracy.



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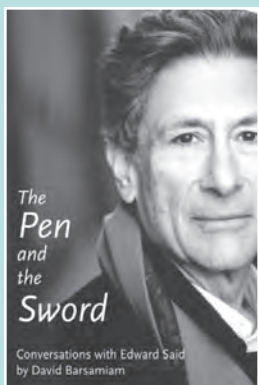


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